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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was to describe prekindergarten children's uses of written language while they were involved in symbolic play. Data were primarily collected by making videotapes of children's spontaneous symbolic play. Videotapes were supplemented by fieldnotes made by the children's teacher. Additionally, children's written language productions were collected, and teacher's discussions with children further verified the meaning of each child's writings. Analyses of the data were based on Halliday's functional view of language in use. Children's written language productions were classified according to Halliday's typology of seven functions served by language. The children wrote prolifically for instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, and informational purposes. They were not observed using the heuristic or imaginative functions of writing. Implications of the findings for teachers and teacher educators are particularized in a set of recommendations. A five-page list of references concludes the document. (Author/RH)

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WRITTEN LANGAUGE USE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S SYMBOLIC PLAY

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WRITTEN LANGUAGE USE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S SYMBOLIC PLAY

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate and describe prekindergarten children's uses of written language within the context of their symbolic play. Videotapings during spontaneous symbolic play served as the primary means of data collection. These were supported by fieldnotes taken by the oberving teacher. Children's written language productions were collected, and teacher-child discussions further verified the meaning of each child's writings. Analyses of the children's uses of written language were based on Halliday's functional view of language in use. The children's written language productions were classified according to Halliday's seven functions served by language. The children wrote prolifically for instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal and informational purposes. They were not observed using the heuristic or imaginative functions of writing. Findings led to recommendations for teachers and teacher educators.

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WRITTEN LANGUAGE USE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S SYMBOLIC PLAY

Introduction

Symbolic play begins to function during the second year of the child's life. Piaget's (1962) monumental work on play described a sequence of ordered development of symbolic play which follows an inverted U-shaped curve. Such play activities begin to emerge at approximately the age of one year, increase over the following three or four years, and begin to decline at about five or six years of age. What is the function of the child's symbolic play? Piaget theorized that such play is "never a behavior which is an end in itself. It is always a continuation of understanding. It is never anything more than a vehicle." (1962, p. 73).

Piaget's naturalistic study has provided researchers with an empirical and theoretical base for further investigations of symbolic play (Arnaud, 1971; Elder & Pederson, 1978; Fein, 1981; Frank, 1968; Garvey, 1977; Lowe, 1974; Overton & Jackson, 1973; Selman, 1971; West, 1974). A review of the literature, however, revealed the lack of a precise operational definition of symbolic play. The following terms were used interchangeably: role playing, role taking, role enactment, imitation, pretend play, pretense, dramatic play, social role enactment, make-believe play, as-if play, imaginative play, sociodramatic play,

symbolic play, representational play, role perception, and person perception.

For the purpose of this study, the term "symbolic play" is a theoretical construct defined as the re-presentation of actions or images with which the child has had experience. Such symbolic representations "do not occur necessarily when the model is present, but may do so when it has been absent for some considerable time" (Piaget, 1962, p. 62). For example, the playful behavior of pretending to eat with a stick instead of a spoon indicates that the child is using the stick in a symbolic way. Furthermore, the playful eating re-presents the actual experience of eating. In Piaget's terms the stick functions as a "signifier" or "symbol" (pp. 67-69).

Piaget's notion that symbolic play indicates the beginning of representational thinking and the emergence of the semiotic function has led researchers to investigate the relationship between such behavior and the development of cognition (Almy, 1968; Christie, 1980; Curry & Arnoud, 1974; Murphy, 1972; Golomb, 1977; Golomb & Cornelius, 1977; Sinclair-De-Zwart, 1969; Smilansky, 1968; Vygotsky, 1966; Yawkey, 1979, 1980). Other researchers have studied the relationship between symbolic play and oral language development (Bowers & London, 1975; Buescher, 1979; Flavel, 1966, 1968; Heathcote, 1970; Irwin, 1975; Jurkovic, 1978; Levy, 1984; Lovinger, 1974; Marbach & Yawkey, 1980; McCune-Nicolich, 1981; Sherrod, Siewert, Cavallora, 1984;

Wolfgang & Sanders, 1981; Yawkey, 1979; Yawkey & Hrncir, 1982). Generally the findings suggested that the development of symbolic play, cognition and oral language tend to occur together and correlate highly between the ages of one and five years. The language studies, however, have stressed oral language production while Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1966) stressed the meaning or functions of language.

Relationships between symbolic play and young children's use of written language have been reported by only a few (Gentile & Hoot, 1983; Isenberg & Jacob, 1983a, 1983b; Jacob, 1984; Pellegrini, 1980, 1985; Schickedanz, 1978; and Wolfgang, 1974). These studies suggest that similarities exist between the processes involved in symbolic play and literate behavior. Children seem to use similar mental processes in both representational processes.

Sociopsycholinguistic research of young children's early writing (Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1975; Ferriero, 1978; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Harste, Burke & Woodward, 1984; Read, 1971, 1973, 1975) indicates that preschool children in a literate environment develop naturally as written language users. Writing is defined here as the process of expressing thoughts by means of graphic symbols. "These literacy achievements are not viewed as 'presursory', 'pseudo,' or as some form or 'emergent readiness.' They are the process artifacts of real literacy." (Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1984, p. 39).

A study highly relavent to this investigation was conducted by Isenberg and Jacob (1983). In a week-long exploratory observational study of two four-year-olds they investigated how children incorporated literacy concepts and knowledge of literacy artifacts into their play activities and examined the role of these activities in literacy learning. Data were collected through focused observations of children's activities in a preschool setting, informal discussions between adult and child, and reports of the parents observations of the two children.

The results of the study indicted that each child engaged in literacy activities in both pretend (animal hospital) and non-pretend (name reading) contexts. When new information about literacy artifacts was presented there was gradual incorporation of parts of that information into the children's play. The new information was consolidated eventually into larger units of play behavior and then repeated several times. When playing with familiar or known information, there was voluntary elaboration of that information which extended into new contexts. Isenberg and Jacob further noted that "whether or not the children incorporated new information or elaborated on known information seemed to be related to the saliency of the information and their current level of literacy learning" (pp.9-10).

Assuming that written language development is occurring at this time and that children use symbolic play to

facilitate their understandings of world experiences, then it seemed reasonable to this investigator to expect that young children would make use of written language which was incorporated into the context of their symbolic play. Hence, the research question raised for this study was: In what ways do prekindergarten children use written language within the context of their spontaneous symbolic play?

Participants

Seven prekindergarten children from one early childhood education center were selected as participants for the study. The children ranged in age from five years 0 months to five years 6 months. All of these children are from middle class families and have had similar school literacy experiences. Their native language is English. Their spontaneous play group at school includes children from two through six years, also from middle class families. A few children are from minority racial and ethnic groups. Most of the parents are college educated and employed in a profession. Some are graduate students.

Data Collection Procedures

The child's use of written language is a holistic process within meaningful contexts and purposeful experiences. This focus required the researcher to provide rich, descriptive data about the participants' naturally occurring behaviors within the educational setting. Hence,

the naturalistic research paradigm was deemed appropriate for the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity and reliability were addressed according to Lincoln and Guba's criteria (1985, pp. 247-248). They state that the basic trustworthiness questions appropriate for naturalistic inquiry deal with the following:

1. Are the findings **credible** as they relate to the realities that exist in people's minds?

2. Are the findings **transferable** from one setting to another depending upon the degree of similarity between the two contexts?

3. Are the findings **dependable**? Were changes in the research design or the rules by which data were interpreted based on stable growing insights and knowledge?

4. Are the data **confirmable** by triangulation?

Videotapings during spontaneous symbolic play served as the primary means of data collection. The researcher had been director of the early childhood education center for several years and had worked with the children on many occasions. Hence, she was familiar to the participating children prior to the study. For the purpose of this investigation, however, the researcher assumed a nonparticipant observer role.

The children had been videotaped previously for research and inservice training purposes. Consequently, the videotaping equipment and procedures were also familiar to them. The week of researcher and videotaping equipment visitation enabled the children to ask questions and accept these changes in their classroom.

The videotapings were supported with fieldnotes taken by the observing teacher. These procedures enabled the researcher to study the children's use of written language which had been incorporated into their play. They also permitted the investigator to compare the videotypescripts with the teacher's fieldnotes. The children's written language productions during the videotaped events also were collected to document the youngsters' use and meaning of written language in their play. Teacher-child discussions further verified the meaning of each child's writings. Thus, triangulated data collection was accomplished by (1) videotapings of the children's symbolic play and writing behaviors, (2) children's written language productions with explanations of intended meanings, and (3) teacher observations and fieldnotes. This process enabled the researcher to confirm the data, to obtain a check on the dependability of the data collected, and to give credibility to interpretations of the data (Evertson and Green, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Data were collected during a three-week period. The children within the spontaneous play group who had been designated as participants were targeted for videotaping.

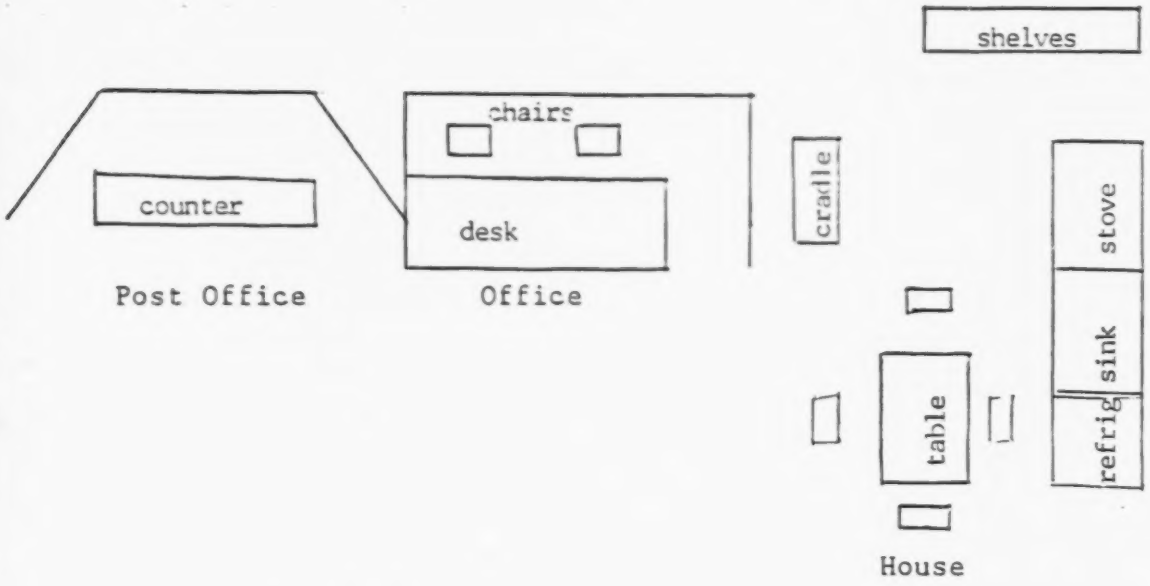
Data Collection Schedule:

Feb 17 - 21	Researcher visited school with camera. 8:30-9:30, Mon.-Fri.
Feb 22	Housekeeping, postoffice, and office centers were set up. (See Table 1.)
Feb 24 - 28	Data collection, 8:30-9:30, Mon.-Fri.

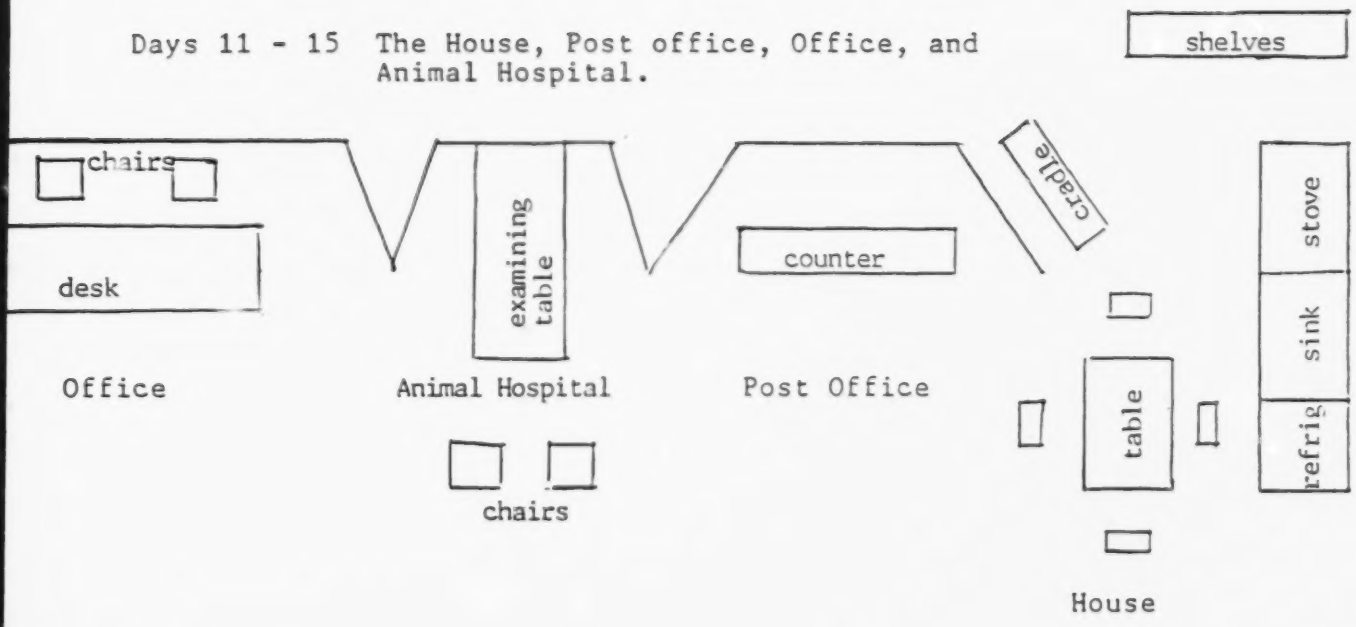
Table 1

The Symbolic Play Centers

Days 1 - 10 The House, Post Office, and Office.



Days 11 - 15 The House, Post office, Office, and Animal Hospital.



Mar 3 - 7	Data collection, 8:30-9:30, Mon.-Fri. Class field trip to animal hospital.
Mar 8	Veterinarian play center was added.
Mar 10 - 14	Data collection, 8:30-9:30, Mon.-Fri.

Qualitative Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to describe the written language behaviors of prekindergarten children during their symbolic play. Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to provide a thick description of the educational setting, activities, writing behaviors, children's discussions of written language, and patterns of child-child interaction. A priori assumptions and assertions were avoided. The descriptive nature of this data analysis led the researcher through an inductive process toward a theory to explain the data. Observational research procedures allowed for unexpected questions and categorizations of data (Evertson and Green, 1986, pp. 168-172).

Analyses of the children's uses of written language were based on Halliday's (1975, 1978) functional-interactional view of language in use: attention is focused on what language can do and what the child can do with language. "Early language development may be interpreted as the child's progressive mastery of a functional potential. Language learning is interpreted as a process of interaction between the child and other human beings." (Halliday, 1975, pp. 5 - 6). Meaning intent, meaning potential, and meaning

exchange characterize language interaction with others. Halliday (1975, pp. 18-25) identified a set of seven functions of oral language a child uses in "learning how to mean" and continues to use throughout adult language:

1. Instrumental ('I want'): satisfying material needs;

2. Regulatory ('do as I tell you'): controlling the behavior of others;

3. Interactional ('me and you'): getting along with other people;

4. Personal ('here I come'): identifying and expressing the self;

5. Heuristic ('tell me why'): exploring the world around the inside one;

6. Imaginative ('let's pretend'): creating a world of one's own;

7. Informative ('I've got something to tell you'): communicating new information.

Sociopsycholingusitic research has contributed to a growing body of knowledge concerning the similarities between learning to write and learning to talk, regardless of the native languages of the users (C. Chomsky, 1970; Ferreiro, 1980; Goodman and Goodman, 1979; Smith, 1977). Recognizing that written language is learned in ways similar to oral language, there is reason to expect developing writers to attempt actively to use written language according to Halliday's seven functions. The coding categories in Table 2 are an adaptation of Halliday's language functions which evolved during data analysis.

Table 2

CODING CATEGORIES

1. Instrumental (I want.)
   to satisfy one's material needs, of enabling a person to obtain the goods and services wanted.
   Ex. Writing a list.
   Writing a check
   Writing an order

2. Regulatory (Do as I tell you.)
   to control the actions and behaviors of others and/or self.
   Ex. Writing plans for future actions
   Writing a sign
   Writing directions or instructions
   Writing an assignment
   Writing prescriptions

3. Interactional (Me and you)
   to interact with those around him or her, to participate in social relationships.
   Ex. Writing letters, post cards, notes

4. Personal (Here I come.)
   to identify and express personal feeling and attitudes.
   Ex. Writing one's name
   Writing about me
   Writing a diary

5. Heuristic (Tell me why.)
   to explore the world around the child, to discover, seek information, and solve problems.
   Ex. Writing questions

6. Imaginative (Let's pretend.)
   to create a world of one's own.
   Ex. Writing a story
   Writing poetry

7. Informative (I've got something to tell you.)
   to communicate new information to someone who does not already possess that information.
   Ex. Writing memos, bulletins, signs
   Writing reports
   Writing labels, name tags
   Writing a newspaper
   Writing textbooks or resource books
   Writing money
   Writing name, address, phone number

Analyses of the children's writings were based on methodologies used in the writing research of Clay (1975). For example, from Clay's findings we can see that children's developing written language progresses from nonstandard representations to conventional spelling by passing through these categories: scribbles, alternative scripts, pictures, random letters and numerals, organized letter sequences, invented spelling, and conventional graphic representations other than own name (pp. 20-41).

Results

The quantity of data collected was too profuse for presentation here. Consequently, examples were selected for illustration.

The researcher was able to identify and classify the children's written language productions according to Halliday's seven functions served by language. See Table 3.

Table 3 Children's Uses of Written Language

	House	Office	Post Office	Animal Hospital
Instrumental	checks for goods and services		checks for goods and services	
Regulatory	assignments	assignments appointments	instructions appointments	ticket-rules sign prescription directions
Interactional	letters post cards	letters post cards	letters post cards	
Personal		name on drawing		
Heuristic				
Imaginative				
Informational	address alphabet sign money	address name phone number money	name money	

Center I The House

Description of Contents: The housekeeping area contained equipment and props traditional to such an area: stove, sink, refrigerator, kitchen accessories, table, chairs, cradle and blankets, shelves, dolls and accessories, dressup clothes, and telephone. Added to this, however, were literacy materials: housekeeping magazines, local newspaper, telephone book, checkbook with checks, paper, and pencils.

Uses of Literacy

Instrumental. Some children wrote checks for specific goods and services. Jace wrote a check for the animal doctor for $100 at the kitchen table (Figure 1). He took it to the post office mailbox and returned to the house to write again. Thomas wrote a check for macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, and jelly at the kitchen table (Figure 2). He pointed to his writing as he read it to Carrie, "That's peanutbutter and macaroni and cheese and jelly for the baby." Carried responded, "Ok, so macaroni and cheese for the baby. What else do we need?" Thomas then put the checkbook in his pants pocket and said, "This is my wallet." Carrie took the checkbook from Thomas saying, "I'm going to write something. This is how much it's going to be, Ok?" She wrote a check for $15 for macaroni and cheese and grape juice (Figure 3).

Amber also wrote seven checks at the kitchen table. They were for office workers, the doctor, the house payment,

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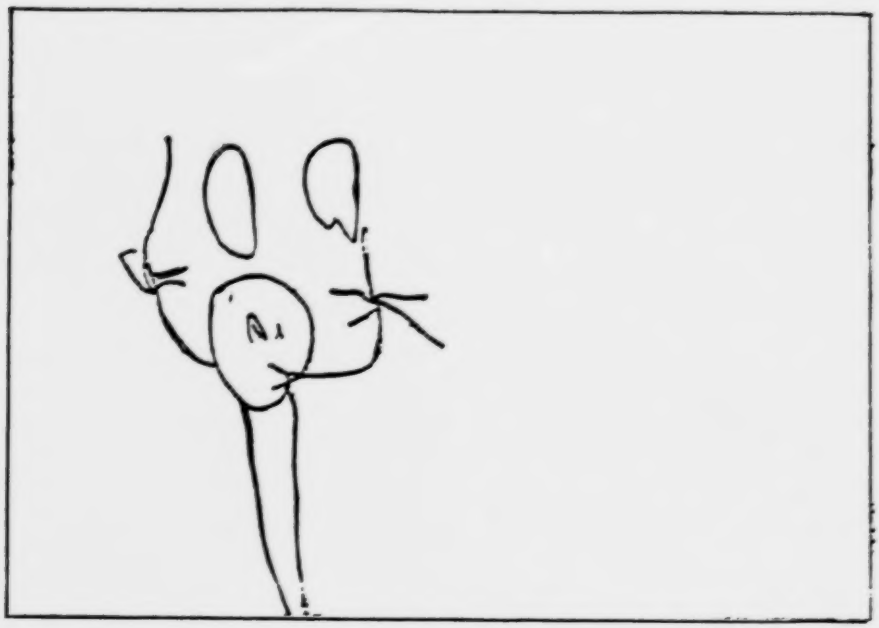


Figure 1. Jace's check for the animal doctor for $100.

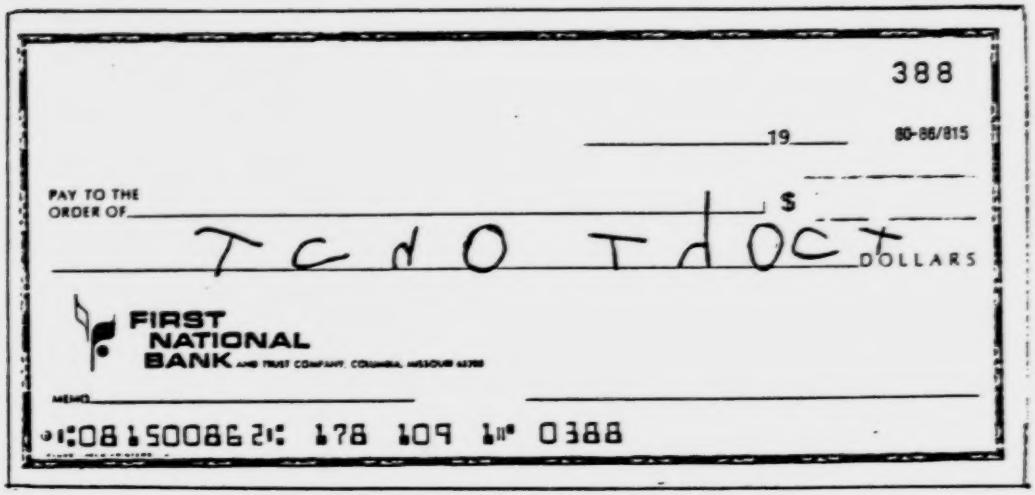
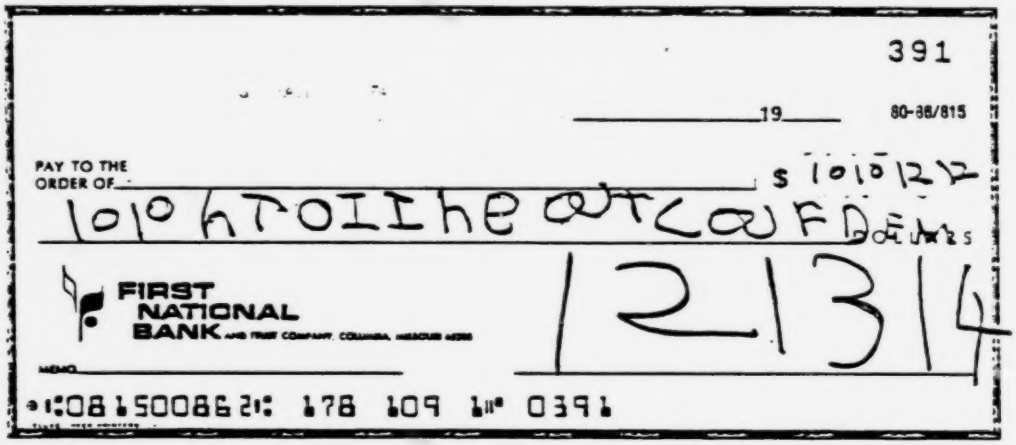


Figure 2. Thomas' check for macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, and jelly.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19 80-38/815

PAY TO THE ORDER OF $ 10 10 12 12

10 10 ATOI I he @rCOUFD Dollars

FIRST NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST COMPANY, COLUMBIA, MISSOURI 65201

12 13 14

MEMO

⑆081500862⑈ 178 109 ⑈ 0391

Figure 3. Carrie's check for $15 for macaroni and cheese and grape juice.

and video equipment. Each check was accompanied by a note of explanation to the recipent (Figure 4). She put her checks and notes in two envelopes, sealed them and wrote her name on the outside of each one. Later Amber put her envelopes containing the checks and notes in a box on top of the refrigerator and said she had to "stay home and balance the checkbook."

Regulatory. Andy was playing with Stacey when he sat at the kitchen table and wrote "an assignment." (Figure 5).

Interactional. Some children wrote letters and post cards. Jace wrote 209 and his name on a paper. He added a stamp and put it in the post office mailbox (Figure 6). He said, "It's just a letter." Thomas addressed two papers to 606 and mailed them. He also addressed a card to 606, signed his name, and mailed it. Andy wrote a message on a check, placed it in an envelope, licked and sealed it, took it to the post office, and put it in the mailbox. He said, "Here guys, Mail this to.... mail this to Judge 28... 606." His message said, "Please come to Kansas City. Love, Andy". Carrie wrote a message which said, "I love you." She signed her first and last names and wrote her phone number. Deidre prepared a post card with stamp and address and a message saying, "I love you." (Figure 9).

Informational. Thomas wrote alphabet cards at the kitchen table. Each one contained a letter with a picture of an item that begins with that letter: A for Alligator, B

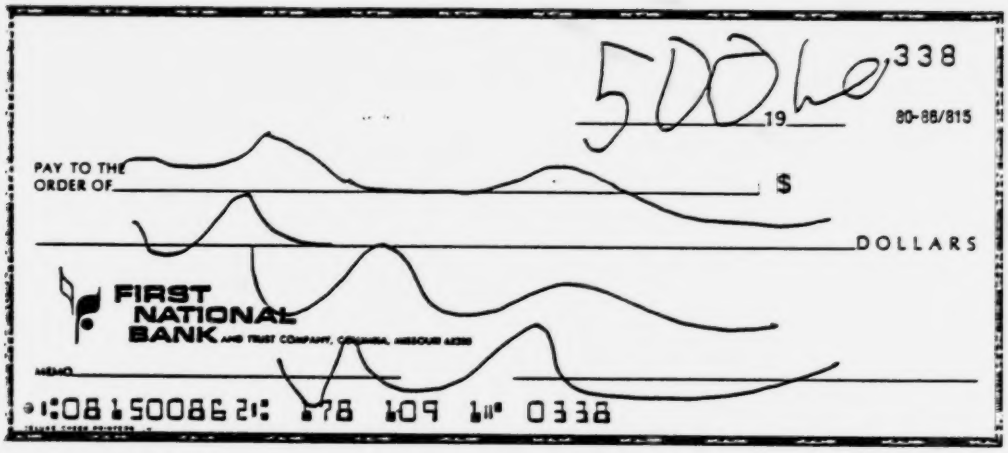
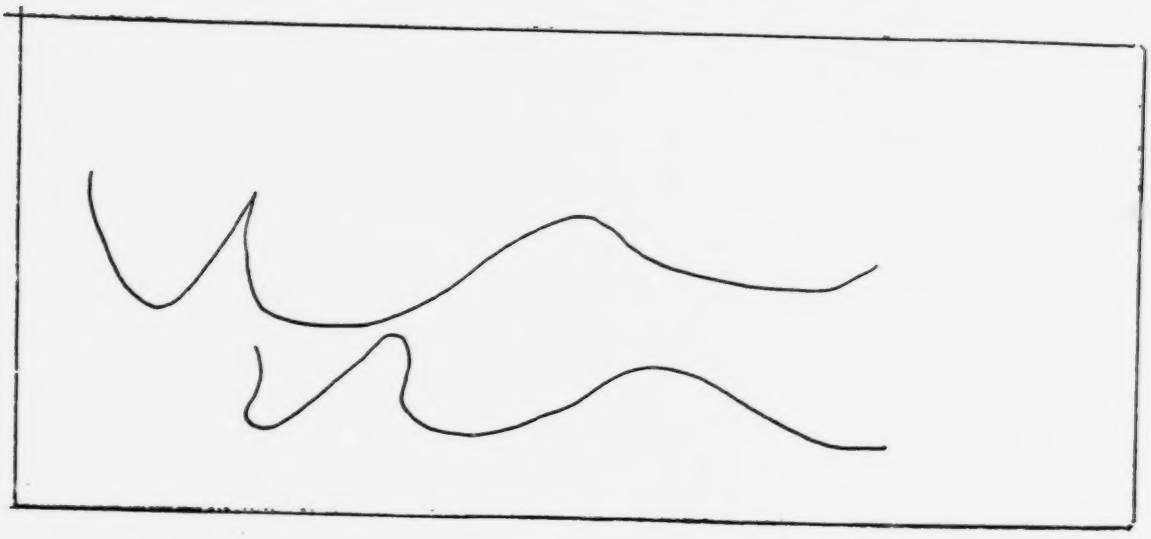
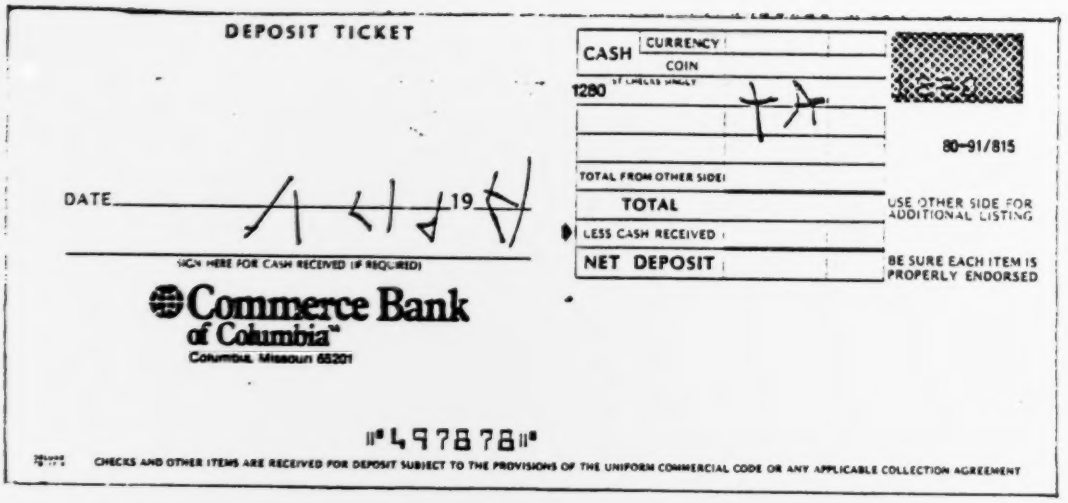


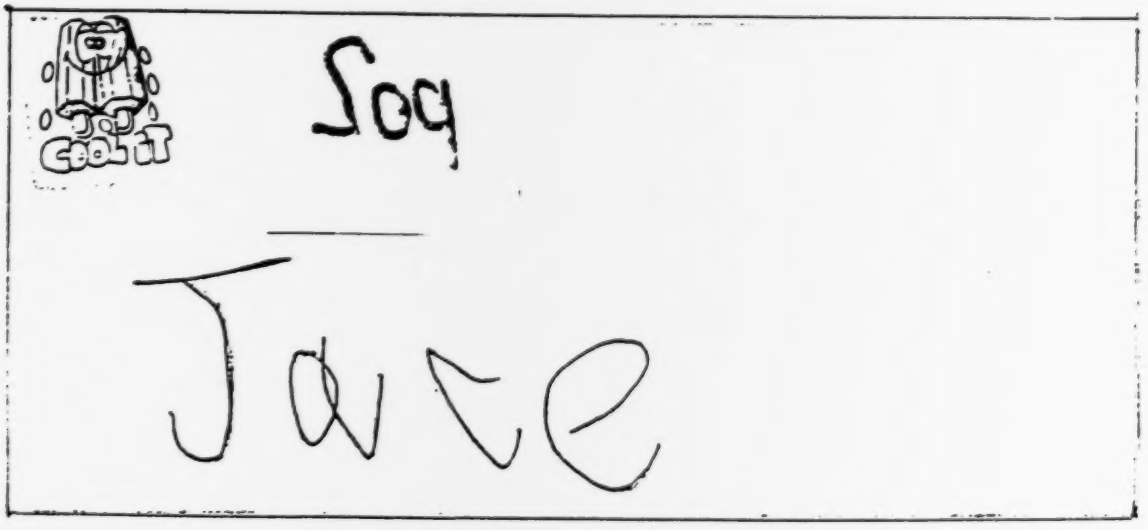
Figure 4. Amber's check and note. "This is $500 to pay off the house." The note says, "Pay your house off."




DEPOSIT TICKET

CASH CURRENCY
COIN
1280
80-91/815
TOTAL FROM OTHER SIDE
TOTAL
LESS CASH RECEIVED
NET DEPOSIT
USE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL LISTING
BE SURE EACH ITEM IS PROPERLY ENDORSED
DATE 4/14/19
SIGN HERE FOR CASH RECEIVED (IF REQUIRED)
Commerce Bank of Columbia
Columbia, Missouri 65201
⑈497878⑈
CHECKS AND OTHER ITEMS ARE RECEIVED FOR DEPOSIT SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE UNIFORM COMMERCIAL CODE OR ANY APPLICABLE COLLECTION AGREEMENT

Figure 5. Andy's assignment



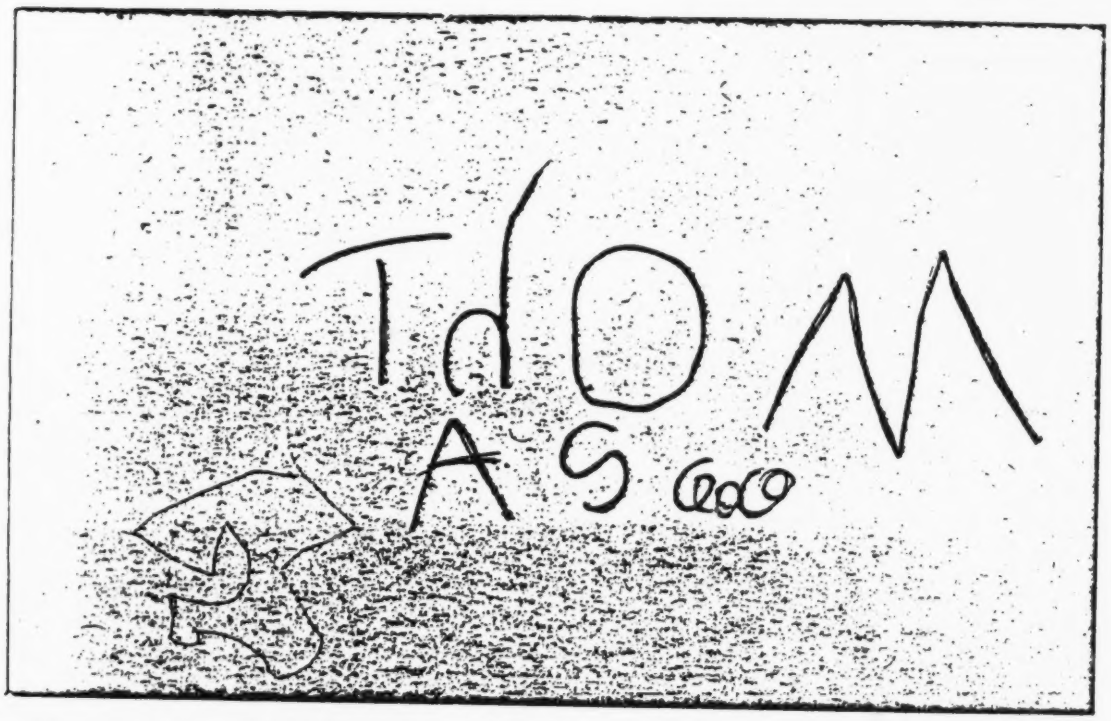


Figure 7. Thomas' mail. "It's to 606. It is their mail."

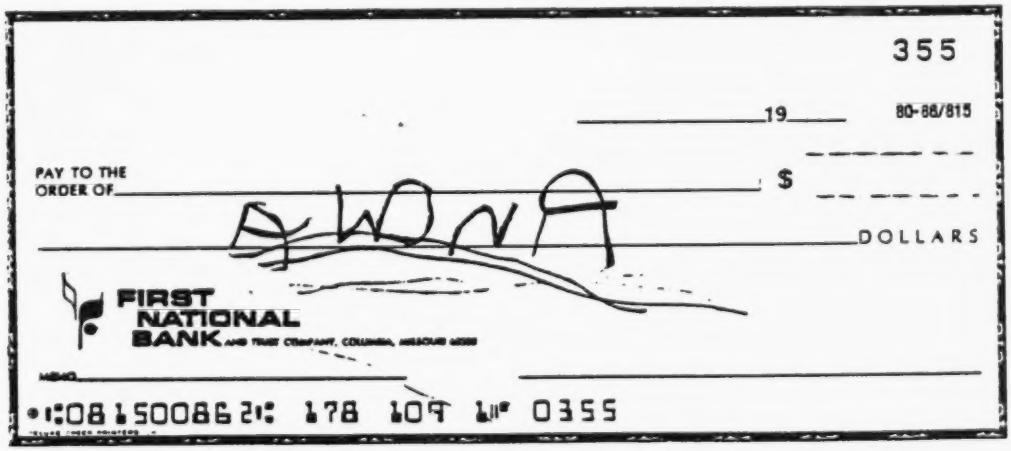


Figure 8. Andy's mail. It says, "JUdge 28, Please come to Kansas City. Love, Andy "

Figure 9. Deidre's mail. "I love you."

for Bear, C for Circle, and S for Strongman (Figure 10). He became teacher to the babydoll by putting a pencil in the doll's hand, showing it how to write, and saying, "That's a good 'N', Baby." (Figure 11). Deidre, who was working next to Thomas, also wrote the alphabet, but said hers was for her mother.

Brian entered the house and talked on the telephone. He then went to the post office, wrote on a card, cut it, took it to the house, and left it under the telephone receiver. His sign said, "Telephone broken." (Figure 12.)

Center II The Office

Description of Contents: The office consisted of a 2' x 4' carrel supplied with two chairs, two telephones, two telephone books, business stationery, envelopes, business forms, cash receipts, checks, paper clips, rubber bands, file folders, junk mail, scissors, paste, and pencils. The area was walled on three sides by a cardboard. A sign "The Office" and a picture of people working in an office were posted on the walls.

Uses of Literacy

Regulatory. Brian wrote that he had a 5 o'clock appointment with Dr. Neice because he was sick (Figure 13). Andy wrote on a paper and said, "I'll be the judge. I have to assign all these assignments, Sheesh!" He wrote on

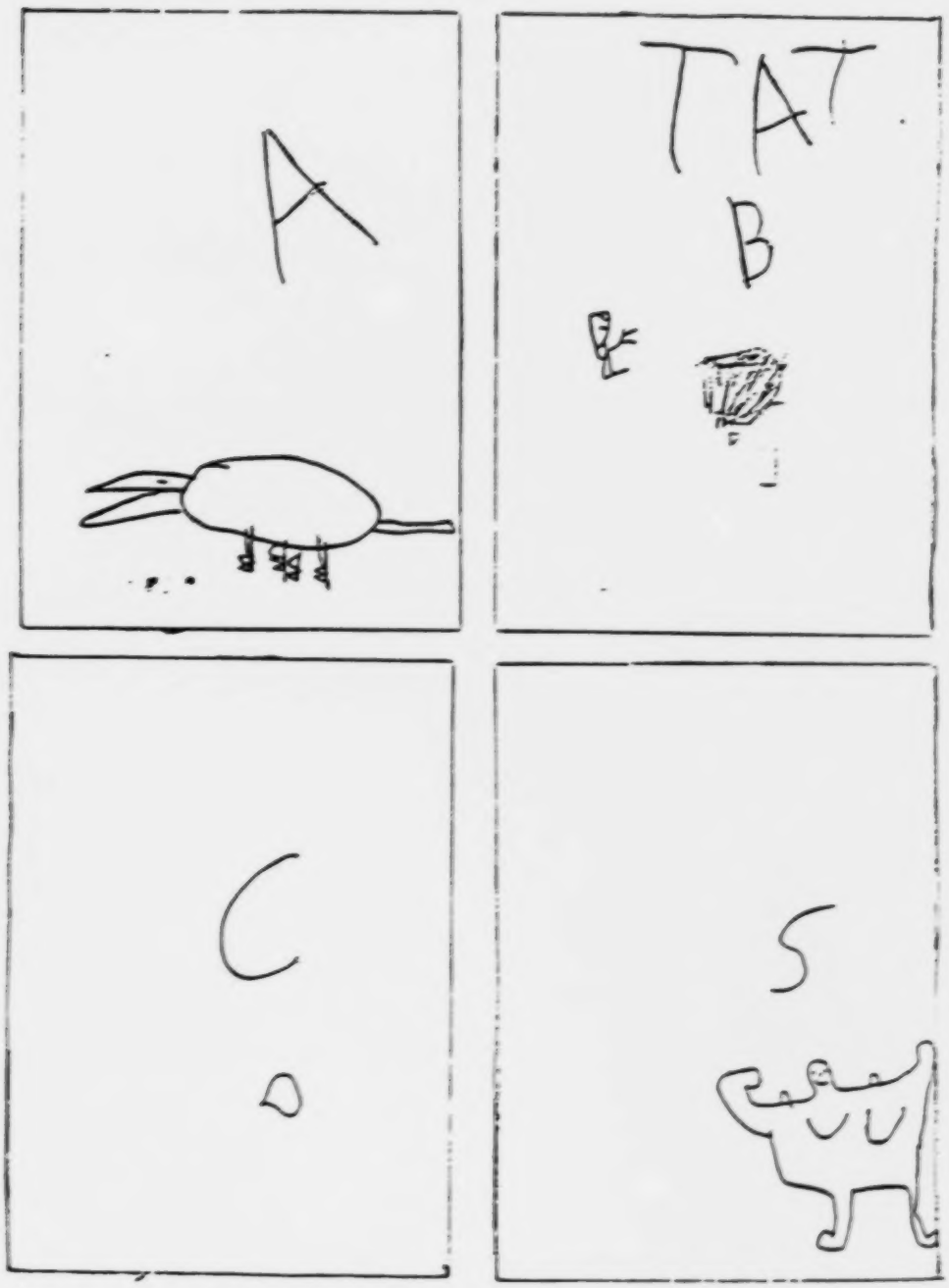


Figure 10. Thomas' alphabet cards. "A for Alligator, B for Bear, C for Circle, and S for Strongman."

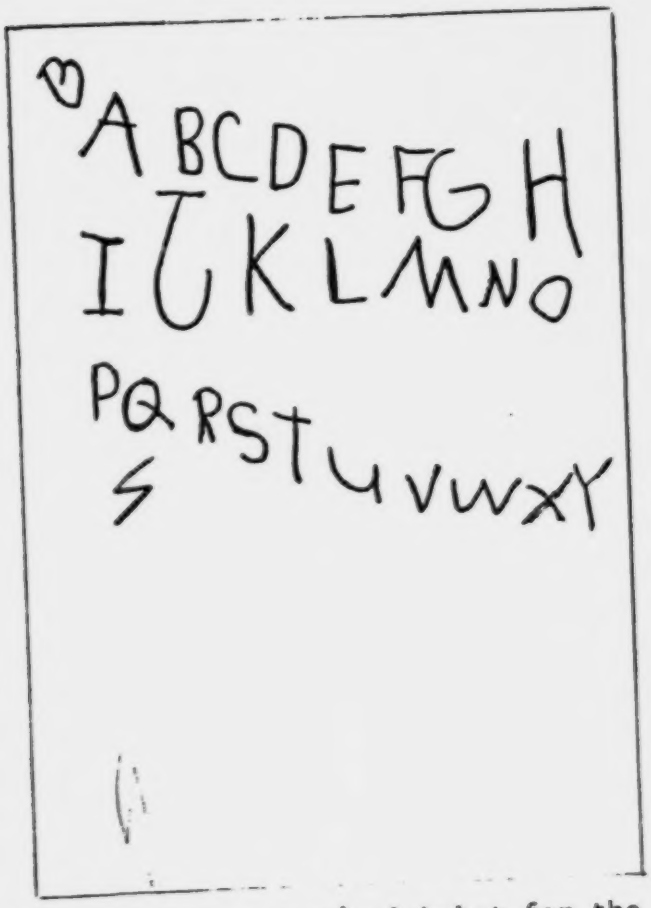


Figure 11. Thomas' alphabet for the baby doll. "That's a good N, baby."

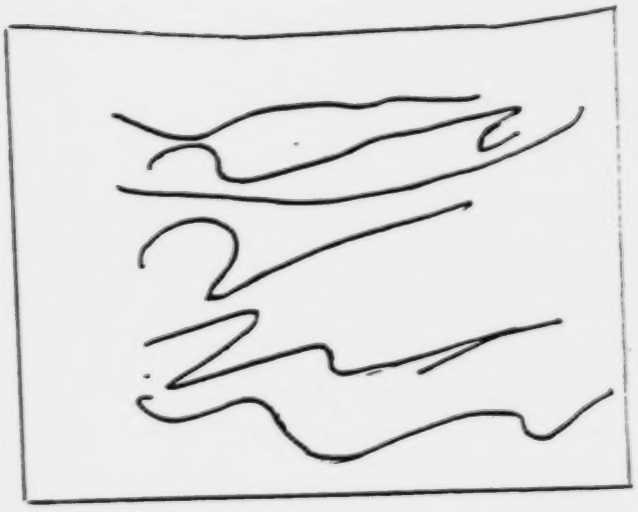


Figure 12. Brian's sign. "Telephone broken."

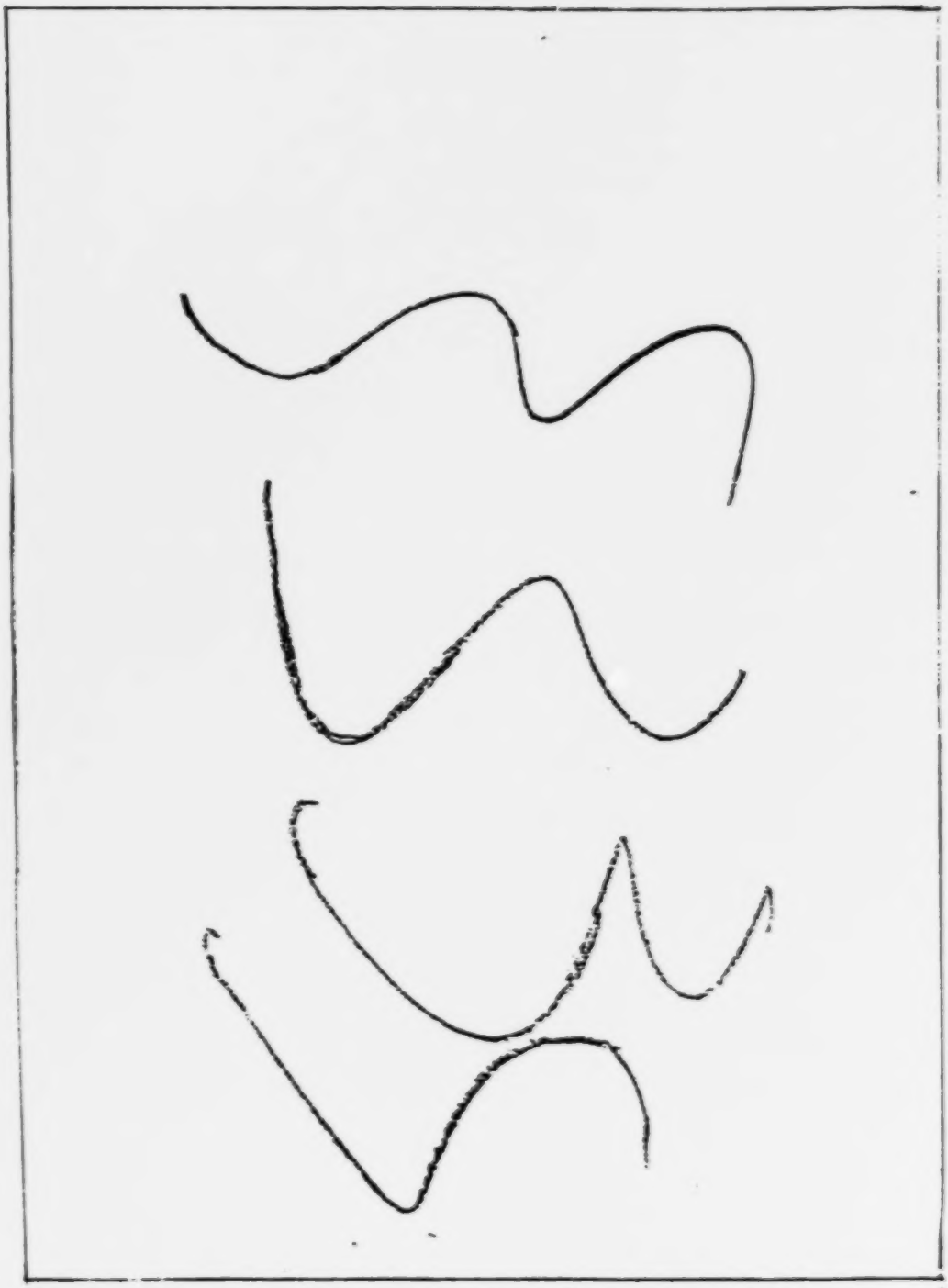


Figure 13. Brian's appointment. "I have a 5 O'clock appointment with Dr. Neia. I'm sick."

another paper and said to Katie, "Why don't you be the judge. You have to sign your mail."

Interactional. Amber wrote several letters and cards, took each one to the post office, and put it in the mailbox. First she wrote her name on a card, enclosed it in an envelope and wrote her name on the envelope. She then wrote her name and her mother's name on a card and affixed a stamp before mailing it. She wrote on a third card, "Dear Mom and Dad, Love, Mom and Dad." (Figure 14) She wrote 605 on an envelope and mailed it, too. She explained, "That is my number that my office is." Amber wrote several letters and read each one to the teacher: "Hello, Goldie, I hope you don't mind. I have to go to school some days, but I'll always come home. Love, Goldie (Figure 15). "This is for you, Grandma June. I hope you're doing well. Love. Hope you're doing well back in Illinois. Love, Penney, Patty, Amy, Aunt Nancy, and Uncle Wayne. Dear Mom and Dad, I hope your jobs are happy. I love you. Love. Dear Grandma, Love. Dear Grandpa, I hope your job is going very happy.

Thomas wrote a message which said, "We are going to the contest." He wrote 714 indicating that it was from the office (Figures 16 & 17). He also sent a message to 605. He placed a paper in an envelope, wrote his name and 606 on the front and said, "This is a letter to 606." Thomas took all of his papers to the post office and put them in the mailbox.

Figure 14. Amber's message. "Dear Mom and Dad, Love Mom and Dad."

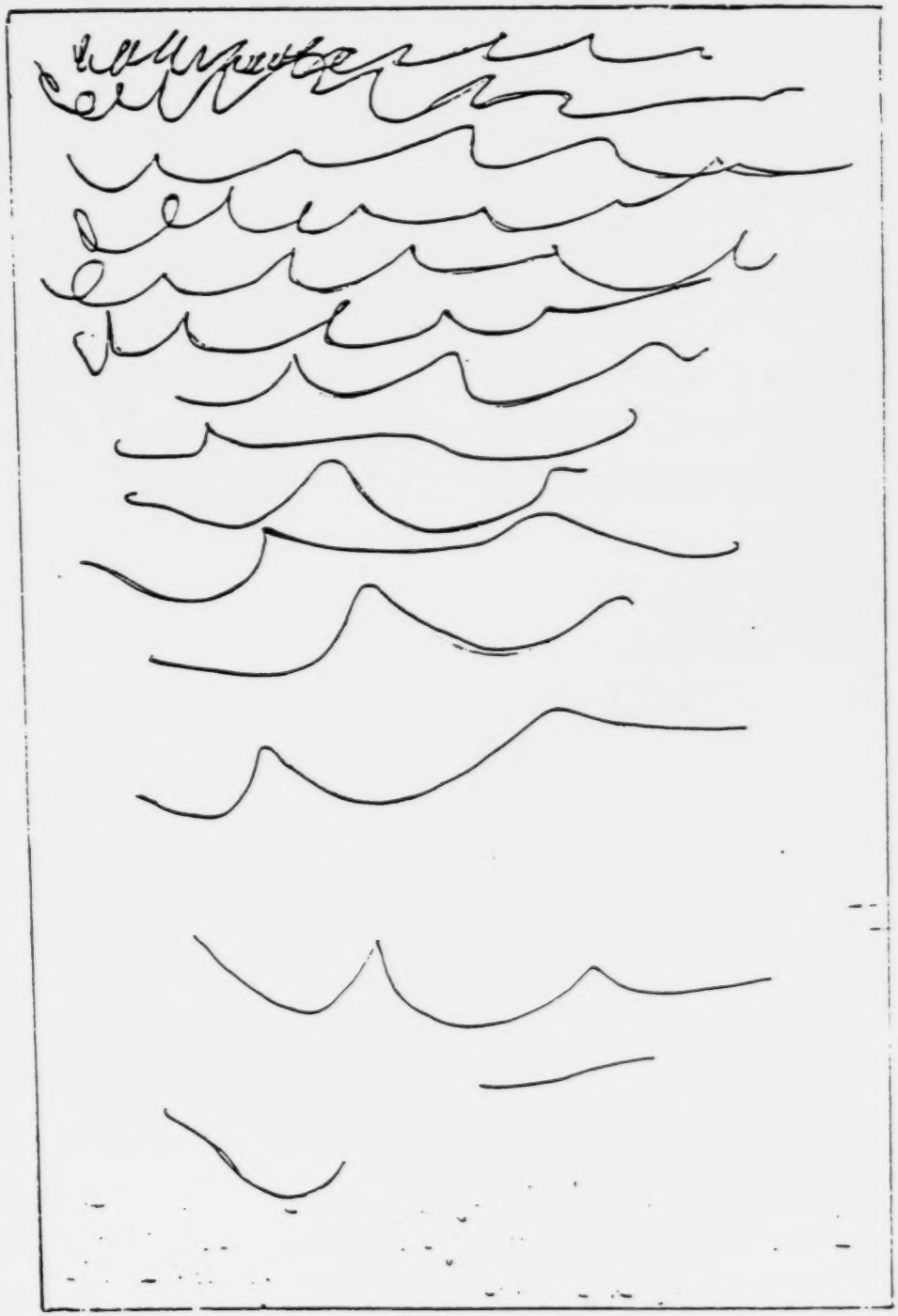


Figure 15. Hello Goldie, I hope you don't mind. I have to go to school some days, but I'll always come home. Love, Goldie "

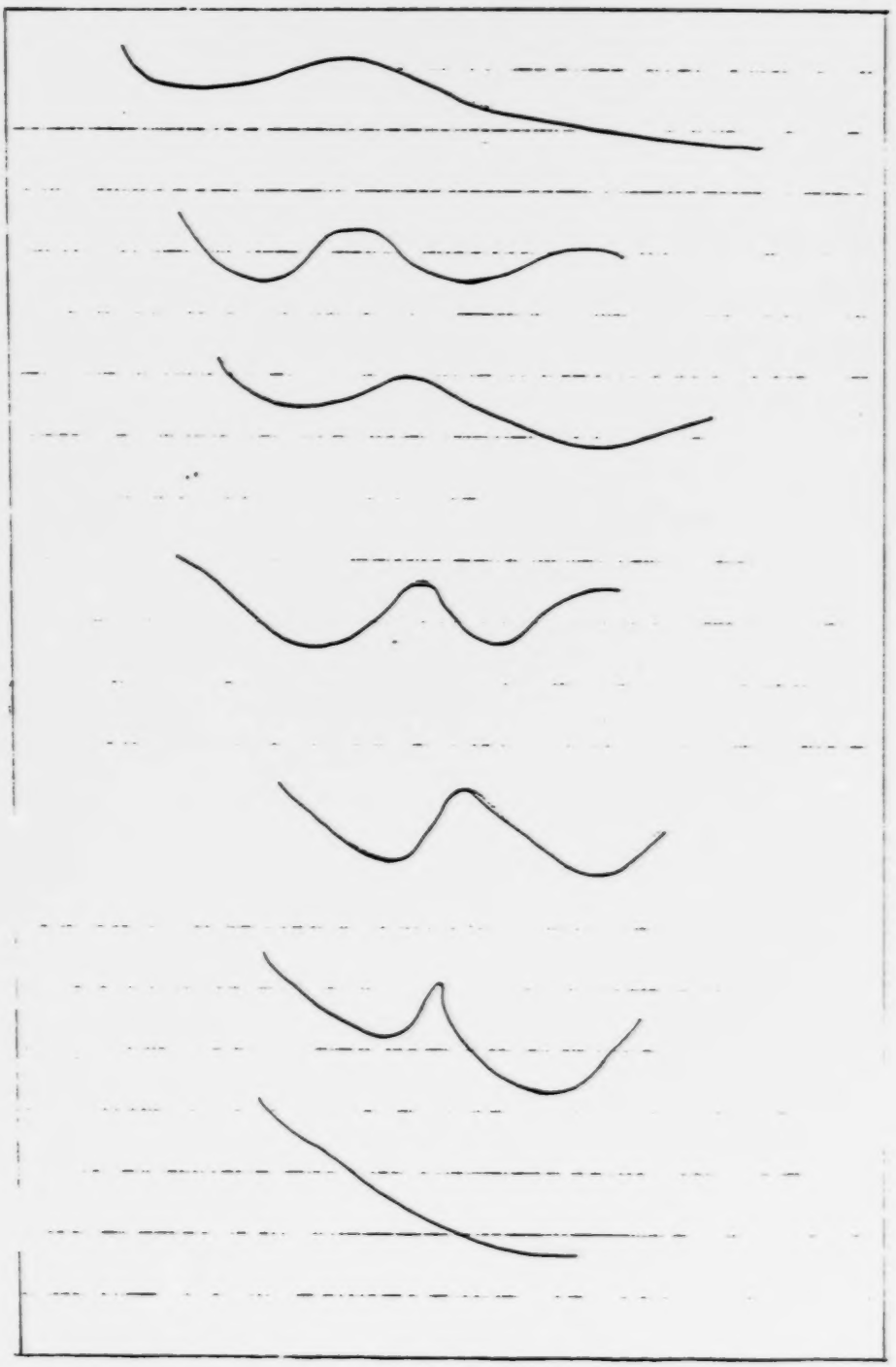


Figure 16. Thomas' message to the mail people. "We are going to a contest."

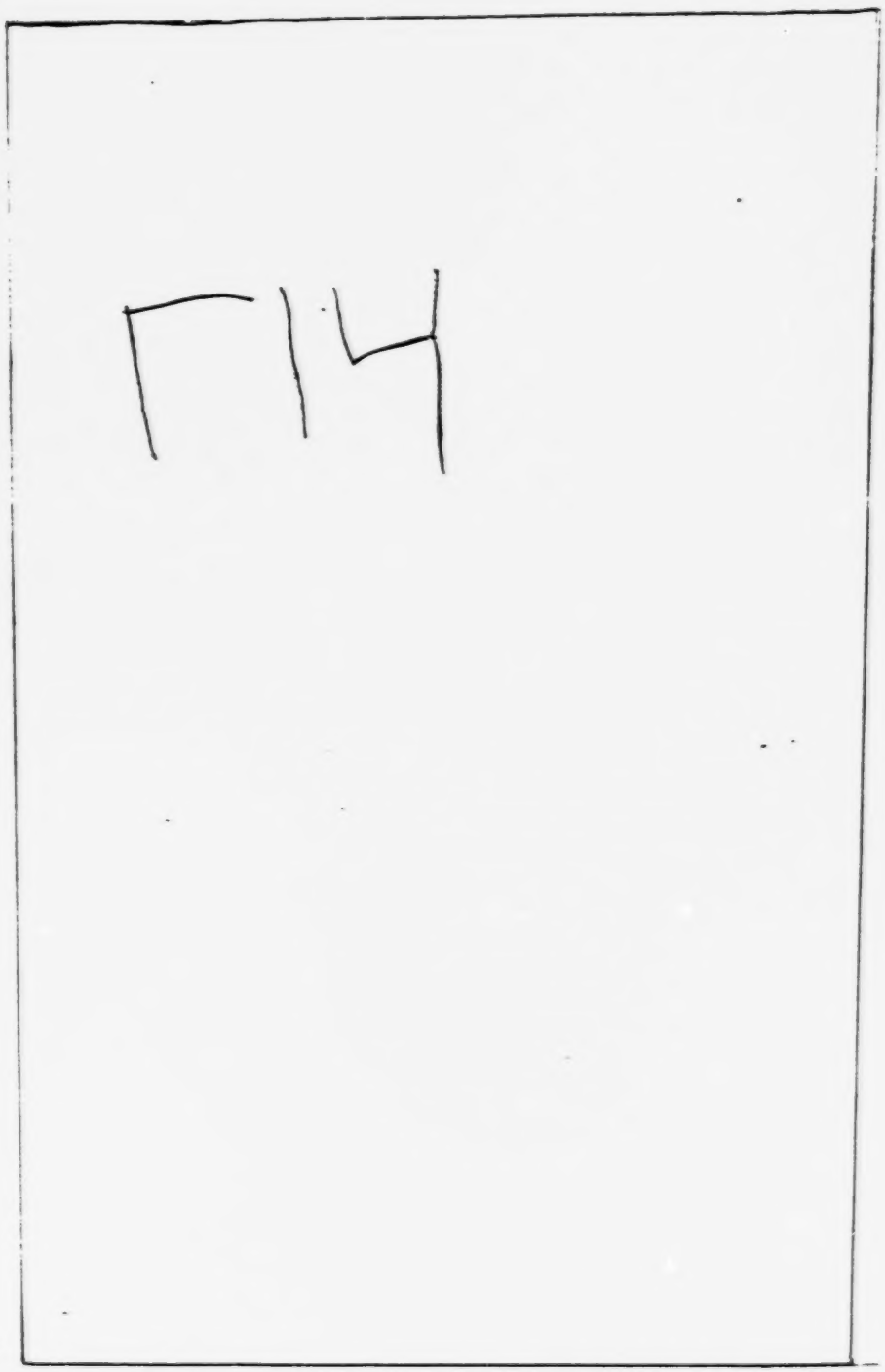


Figure 17. Thomas' return address. "It's from 714."

Jace wrote 202 on a paper. As he wrote he said to Carrie, "202, I never heard of this address." Carrie responded, "I haven't either. It might be my house. Maybe it won't cause mine is 262." Carrie then spelled her name for Jace to write on the paper, "C A R R I E, Carrie. Ca ar rie (sounded it out)" Jace added a stamp and 605, took his paper to the post office mailbox, and returned to the office.^ (Figure 18) Jace wrote on a second paper, folded it, placed it in an envelope with a check, sealed it, and wrote 606. He mailed it at the post office and said it was a letter with a bill. Jace drew a picture of a "ship" on a card, wrote 602, and made an x where the stamp would be. He mailed the card. Brian, who was acting as mailcarrier, took the card from the mailbox and said, "Got something for 606." Jace reached to get the card from Brian, "No, That's me. I wrote it." Brian argued, "That's for Amber." Jace insisted, "No, I wrote it. Brian!" Jace grabbed the card from Brian and looked at it, "Hey, You wrote 606. Teacher, Brian wrote on my card. Brian wrote that [pointed to 606], and I wrote 602." Jace then took scissors and cut the card in two. He delivered one part to the office and one part to the house saying, "There's mail for us and mail for you." (Figure 19).

Andy wrote a message to Carrie on a card. It said, "Dear Carrie, We're going on a picnic in St. Louis, and we'll live in separate houses (Figure 20). He also wrote a message on a check which said, "Dear Susan, Be sure to come to a picnic in Kansas City." He added a stamp. At another

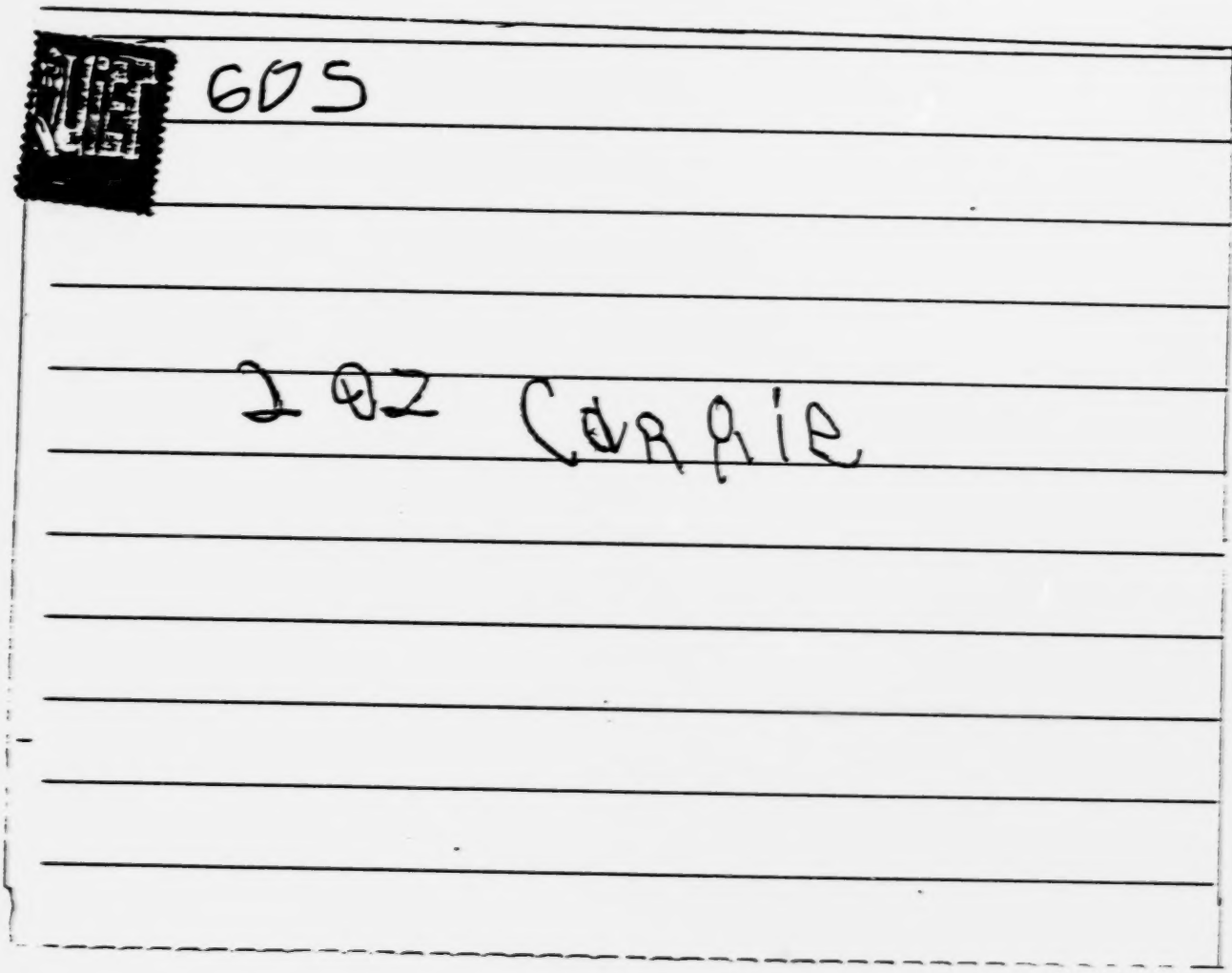


Figure 18. Jace's mail to Carrie.

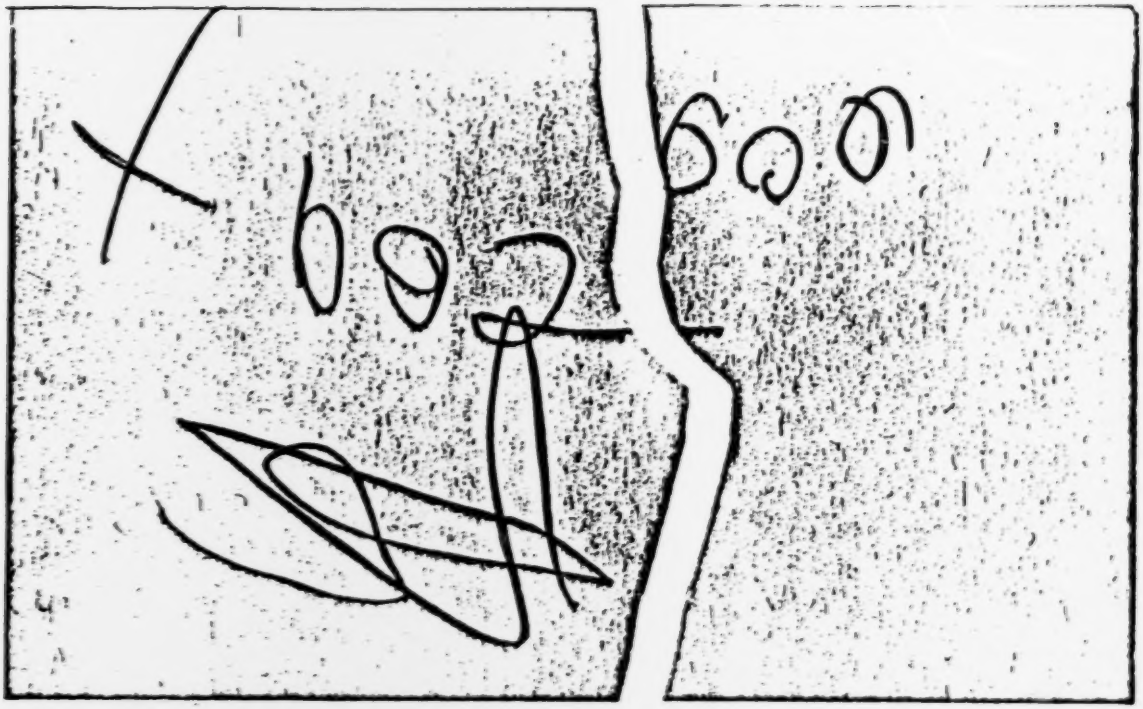


Figure 19. Jace's picture post card of "a ship." Jace addressed it to 602. Brian wrote 606 on the card. Jace cut the card in two and delivered part of it to the office and the other part to the house.

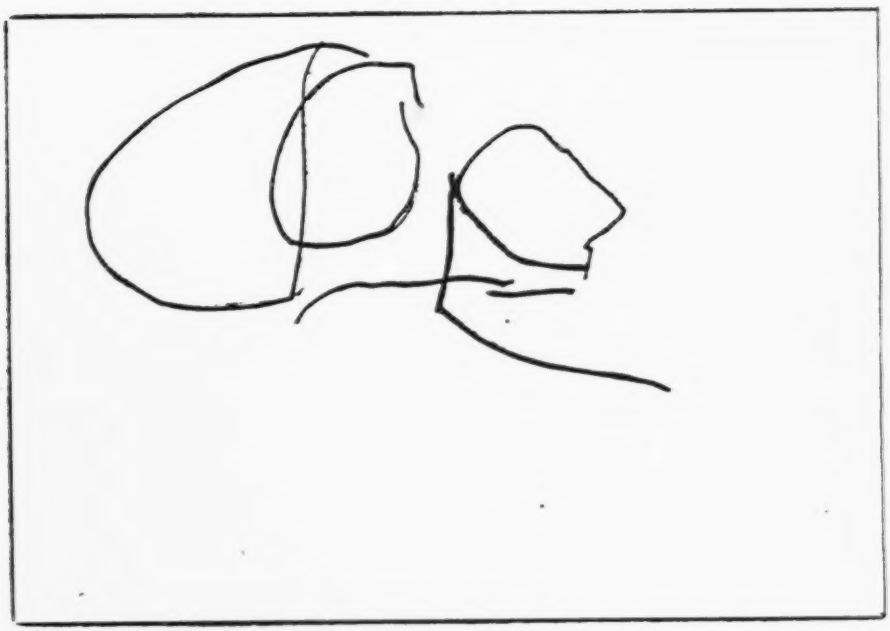


Figure 20. Andy's message to Carrie. "Dear Carrie, We're going on a picnic to St. Louis, and we'll live in separate houses."

time, Andy sat with Katie and Thomas and asked, "How do you make a 9?" Andy wrote 910 on a card and gave it to Katie (Figure 21). He also wrote on a check and said it was from the Kansas City post office for Carrie. As he worked he talked to Carrie, "Hey you know what, I forgot it's in the middle of the night. We better get going." He tore the check from the pad and handed it to Carrie.

Personal. Jace drew around his foot, made a nose and legs and said it was a dinosaur. He wrote his name on his picture (Figure 22). Thomas drew a picture and said, "It's someone wrestling. He got beat up." He also wrote his name on his paper.

Informational. There were several examples of children writing on paper to indicate that it had monetary value. Jace and Thomas wrote on cash receipts. Jace said, "It's a dollar bill." (Figure 23). Amber wrote on checks and said, "It's a check for $100 to me. I am to cash it at the bank and spend it. It's a check worth $500. I was going to put it in my Tootsie Roll Bank." (Figure 24). Carrie wrote on a check, pasted it to an envelope and said it was worth $1. She enclosed a second check in an envelope with a note. She said the check was for $1 for Mom. Carrie wrote on another check and said it was for Wesley because he might like it.

The children wrote names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Jace wrote "Jacob" on a card and put it in an

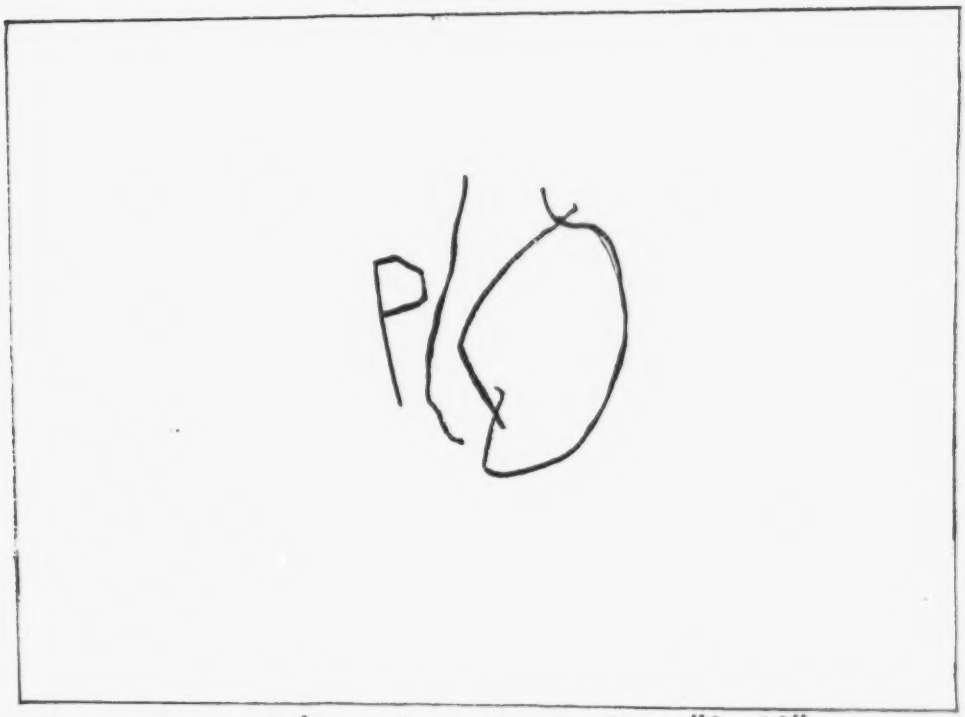


Figure 21. Andy's numbers to Katie. "9 10"

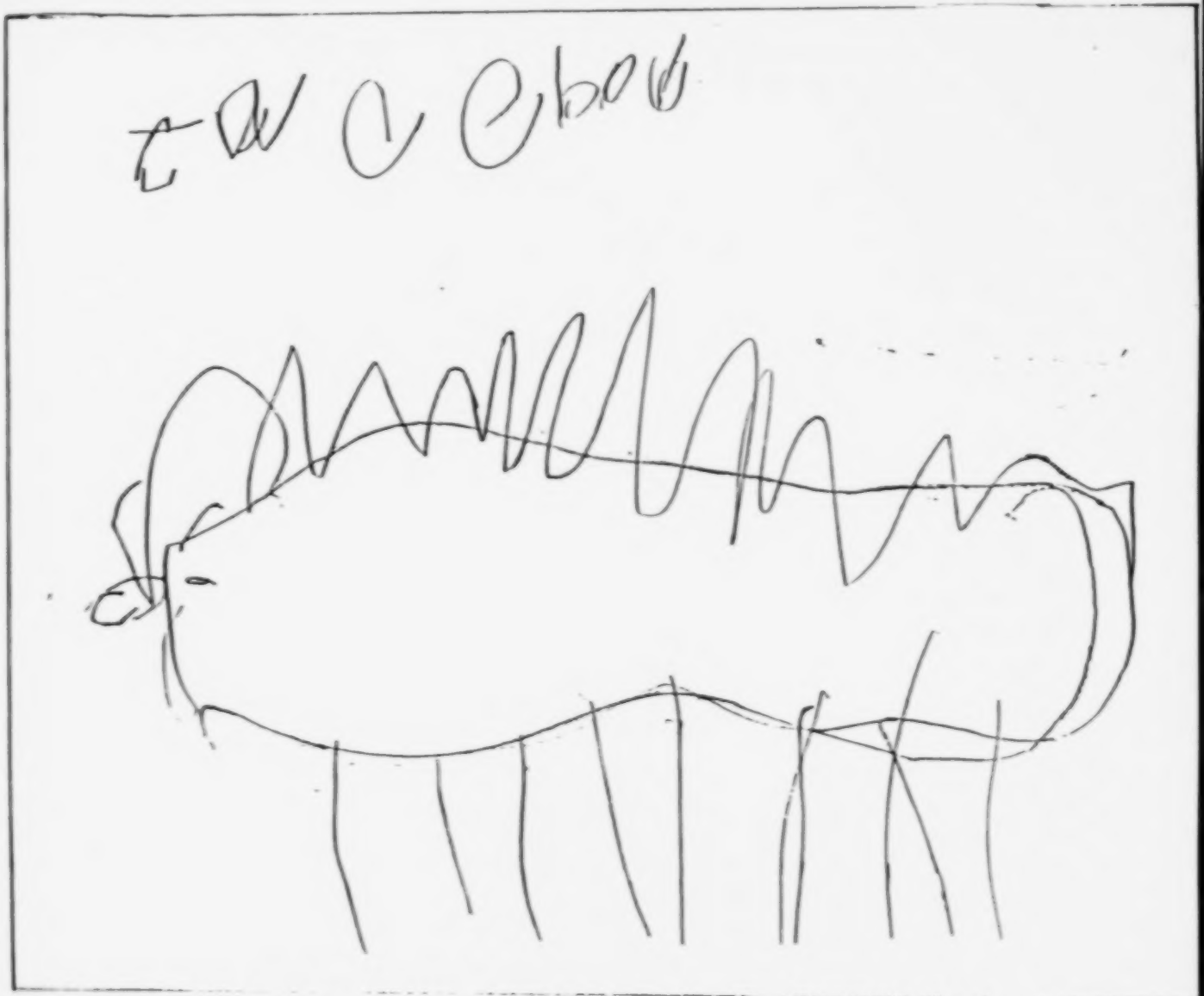


Figure 22 Jace's picture and name. "I drew around my foot. I made a nose. It is a dinosaur."

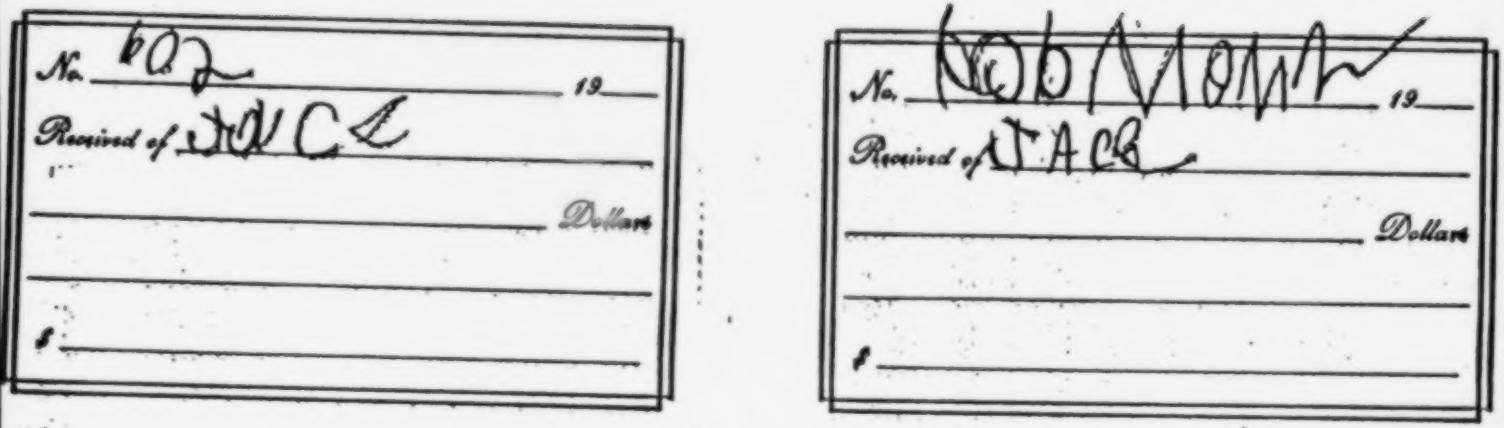
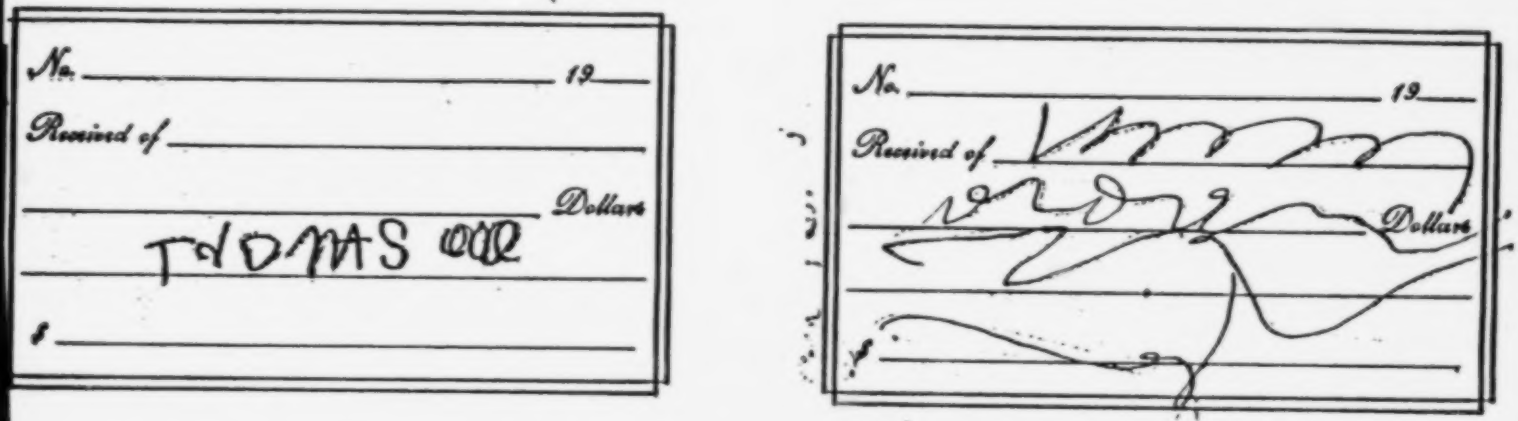


Figure 23. Jace's and Thomas' money. "It's a dollar bill."



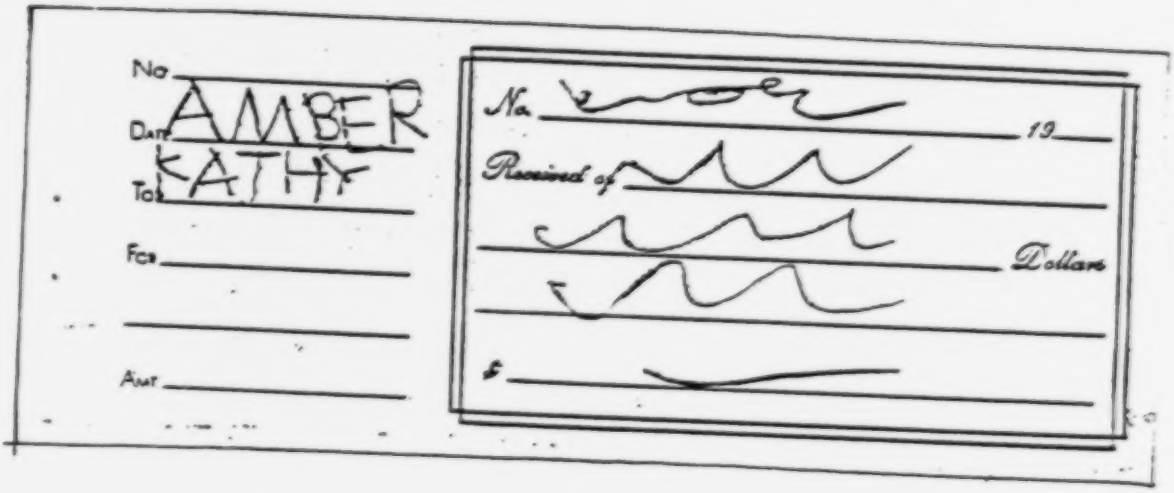


Figure 24. "It's a check worth $500. I was going to put it in my Tootsie Roll Bank."

envelope. He said, "I wrote it for Jacob. It says Jacob." Brian wrote his telephone number on a piece of paper, put it in an envelope and gave it to Amber. Amber said, "It's Brian's phone number he gave me." (Figure 25).

Carrie wrote her name, telephone number, numbers 1,2,3,4,5 and the alphabet. She said it was for "her mommie." Carrie also wrote 606 on the office wall and told the office workers it was their address. She assigned 602 to the house and 605 to Amber's side of the office. As she wrote the addresses on the cardboard dividers she said, "You two are 606. You two are gonna be.... 605." She also wrote on the post office wall and said, "Brian, you got a office and yours is .... 714 (pointed and read to Amber)." To Jace she said, "Brian's is 714."

Thomas wrote 606 on a card and said, "It's just 606." He wrote 714 on a paper and said, "It is our office number, 714." Thomas also drew a picture of cracked eggs and wrote "cracked" (Figure 26).

Center III The Post Office

Description of Contents: The post office consisted of a 3' x 4' shelf enclosed on three sides with red craft paper. The shelves were supplied with envelopes, plain paper, stickers, stamp-sized paper, paste, scissors, and pencils. The top shelf served as a counter and was equipped with a mailbox and a scale. The mailbox had a slot in the front and a large opening in the back. It was covered on five

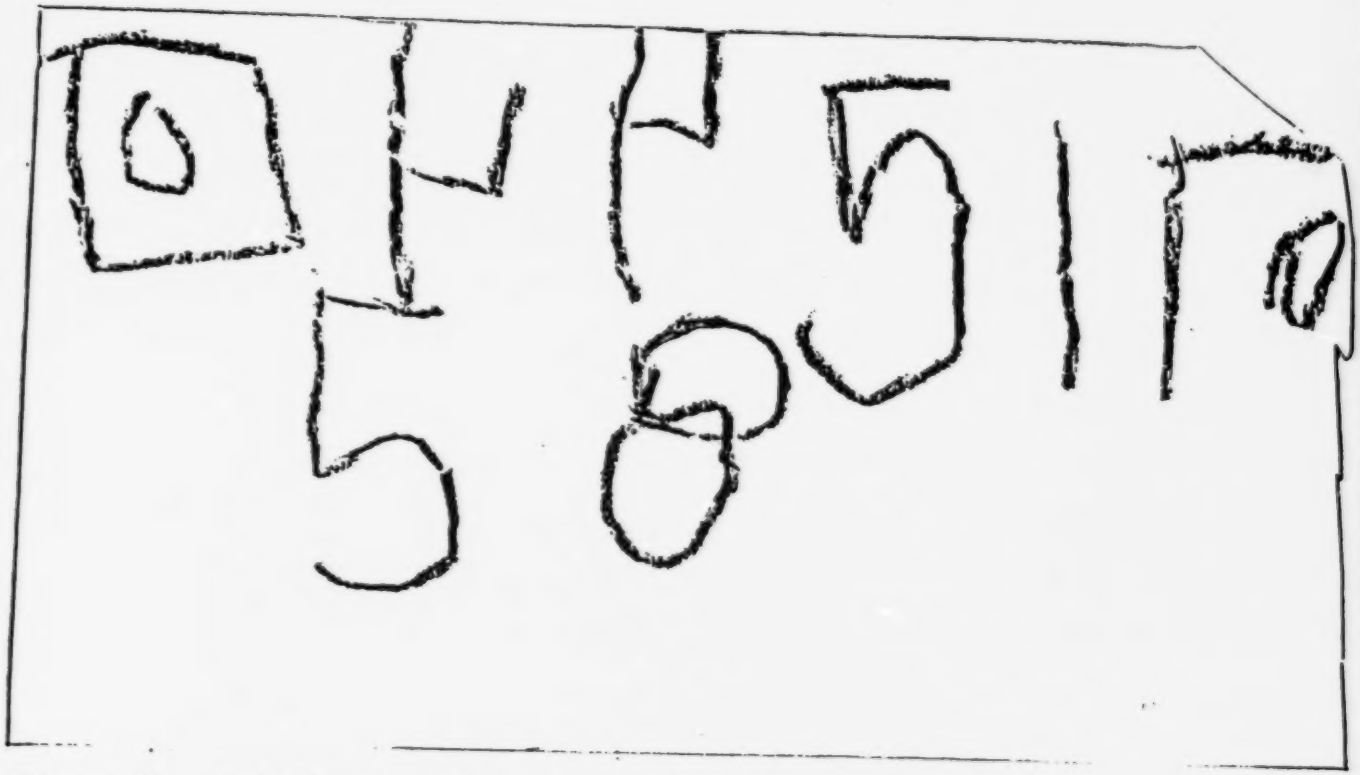


Figure 25. Brian's telephone number for Deidre. "It's Brian's phone number he gave me."

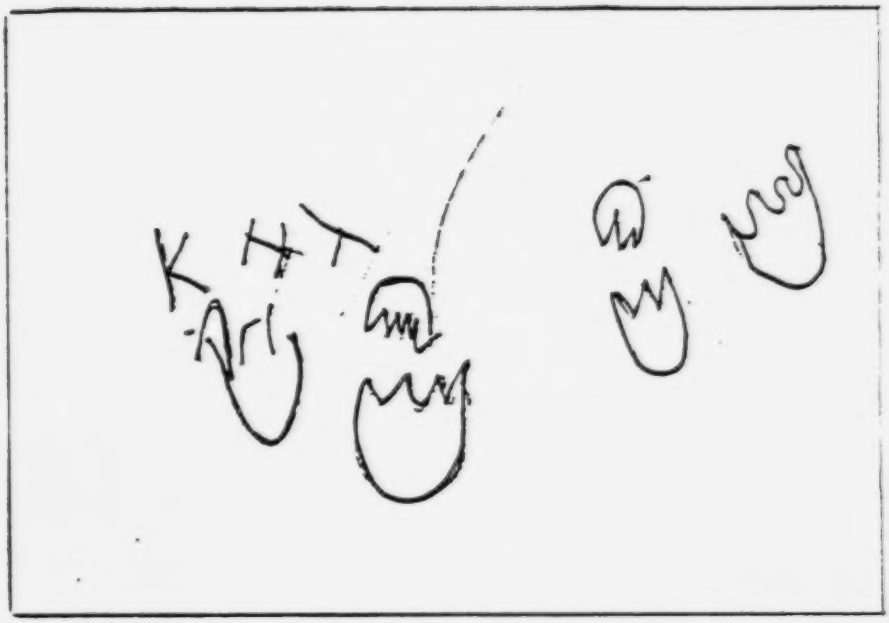


Figure 26. Thomas' drawing and label. "Cracked"

sides with pictures depicting mailing activities. The area was walled on three sides by a cardboard. Pictures of mailcarriers at work were posted on the walls. The sign "Post Office " and labels "mailman" were also posted on the walls.

Uses of Literacy

Instrumental. Brian wrote many checks for specific good and services. He wrote five checks and said they were "to buy food --- corn, peas, fruits and vegetables, to buy stuff for some people's birthday, to buy cookies and cake, for lollipops and cupcakes and big cakes." (Figure 27). At another time he wrote checks "to buy food --- tomatoes, corn, macaroni and cheese, and potato chips, to buy some meat and turkey and chicken and corn, bananas, green beans and cake." He also wrote checks "to buy cake, paste and baby dolls, to buy carrots, corn, vegetables, and cake, to buy special stuff, Valentine cards and Valentine candy, and to buy birthday cake for a friend and corn." While Brian was working he said to Davey, "I'm writing checks. See, it's like a check. You can write on it and it can be a check. Here's some checks. See, they look like checks. You can write on them. I send these checks." When another child tried to enter the post office Brian said, "No, you can't come in here right now. We're busy. We're writing a check."

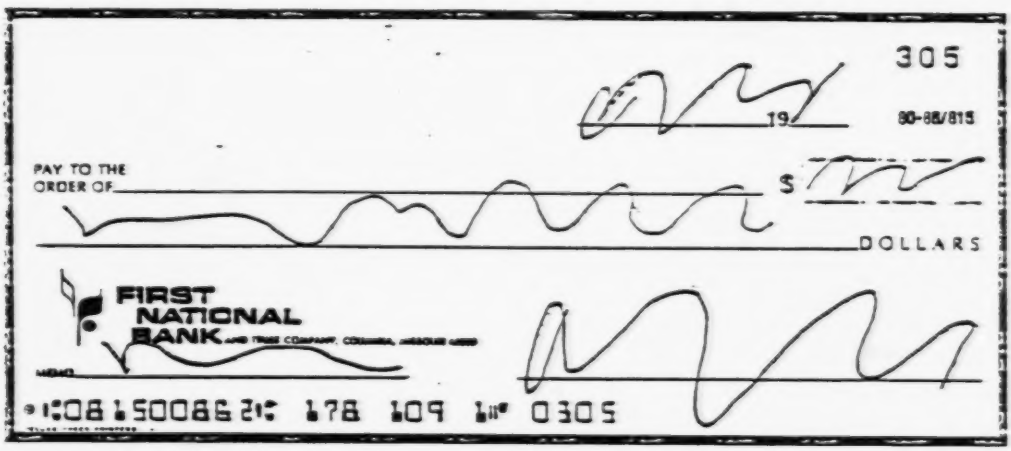


Figure 27. Brian's checks. To buy food --- tomatoes, corn, macaroni and cheese, and potato chips."

Regulatory. Brian put his checks in three envelopes and wrote "Don't open this." on each one (Figure 29). He also wrote "No Open" on a junk mail envelope. At another time Brian wrote on a cash receipt and said, "I have an appointment." (Figure 29).

Interactional. Several children wrote letters and cards and mailed them. Amber drew a picture and said it was her grandma's house. She then wrote on a second card, "Love, Grandma, 605", and pasted it to the first card (Figure 30). Amber wrote on seven more cards and read each message to the teacher: "I love you Mother and Dad. Grandpa, how is your job? Hello, How are you Grandma June? How are you doing? I love you Mom and Dad. Mom, Dad, Love Mom and Dad." Two of her cards were addressed to 606. Three cards had stamps (Figure 31). On another day Amber wrote a message on one side of a card which said, " Dear Mom and Dad, I love you. Gonna be picked up in the early afternoon. Mom" On the other side she wrote her name and put on a stamp. She wrote two similar cards but pasted separate messages to each one. They said, "Dear Aunt Lola, I'm having a wonderful time at school. Please Aunt Lola, please feel well." Dear Ann and Dell, I hope you're feeling well. Dear Ann and Dell, Please say 'Hi' to Paulie." Amber wrote her name on each one. She also wrote a card and a check and put them together with a rubber band. The card said, "Dear Grandma June, I hope you are feeling better.

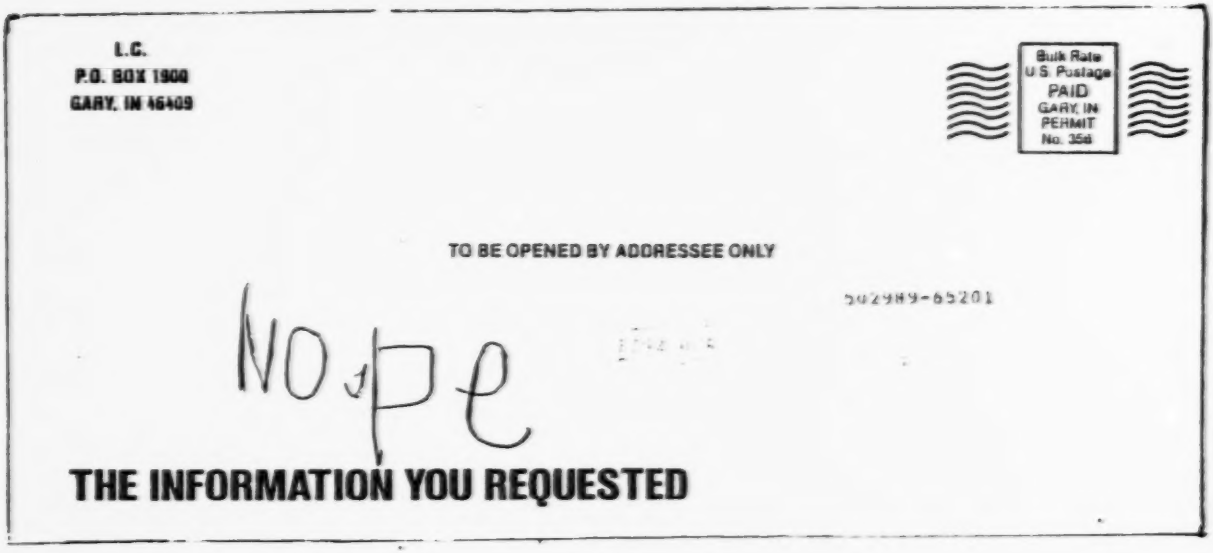


Figure 28. Brian's envelope. "No Open."

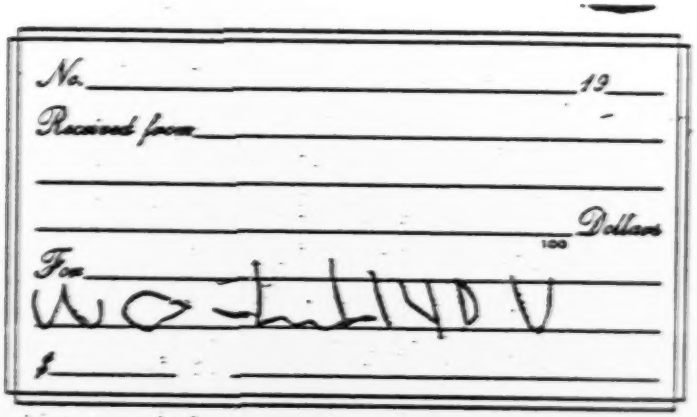


Figure 29. Brian's appointment. "I have an appointment."

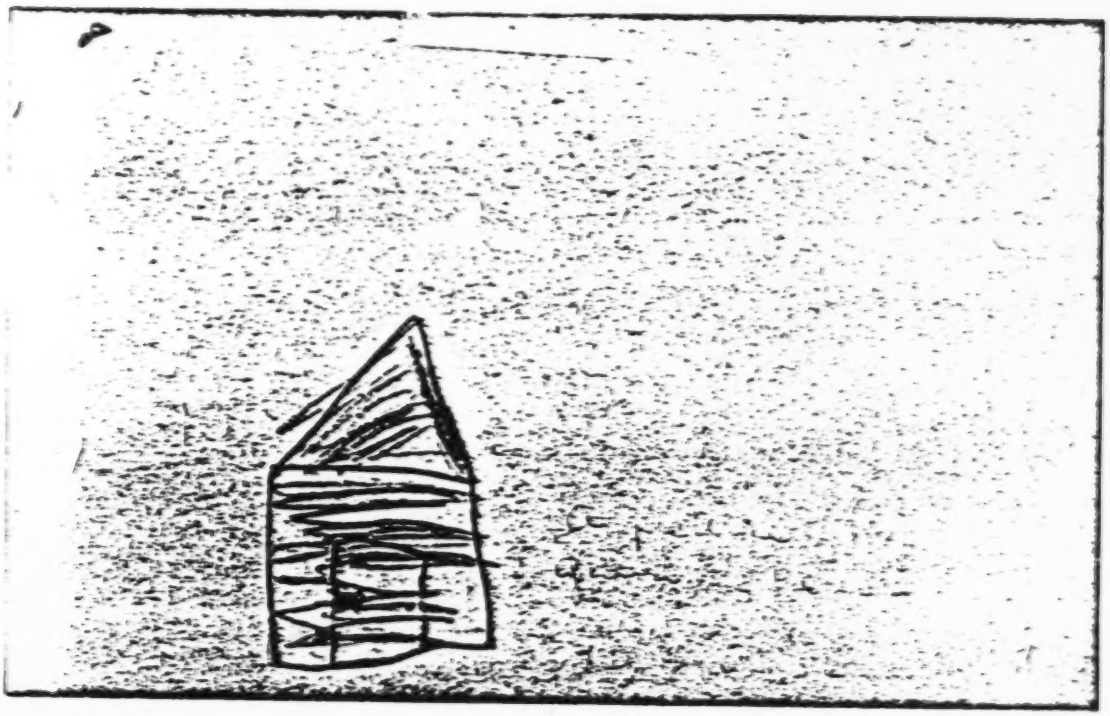
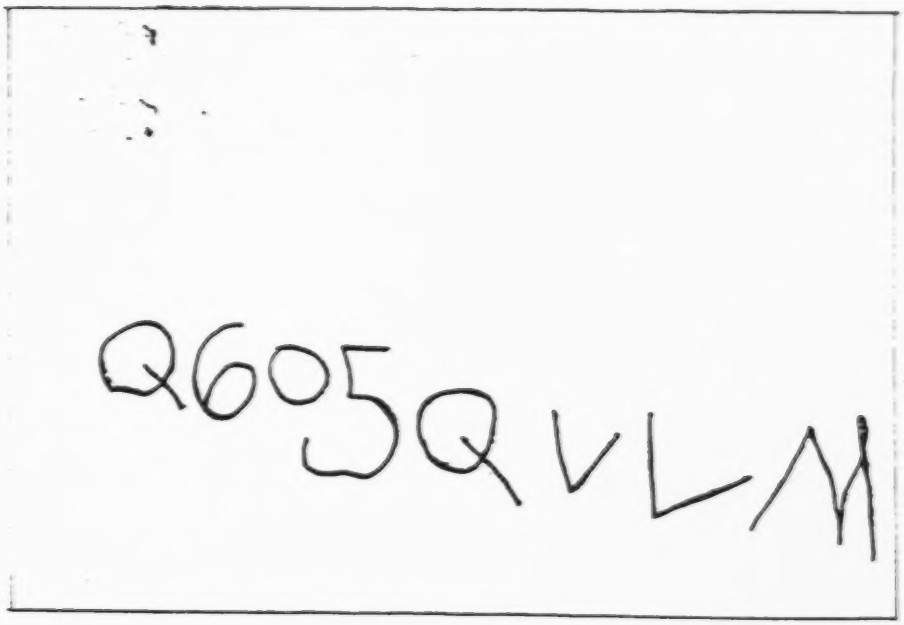


Figure 30. Amber's drawing and message. "Love Grandma, 605"



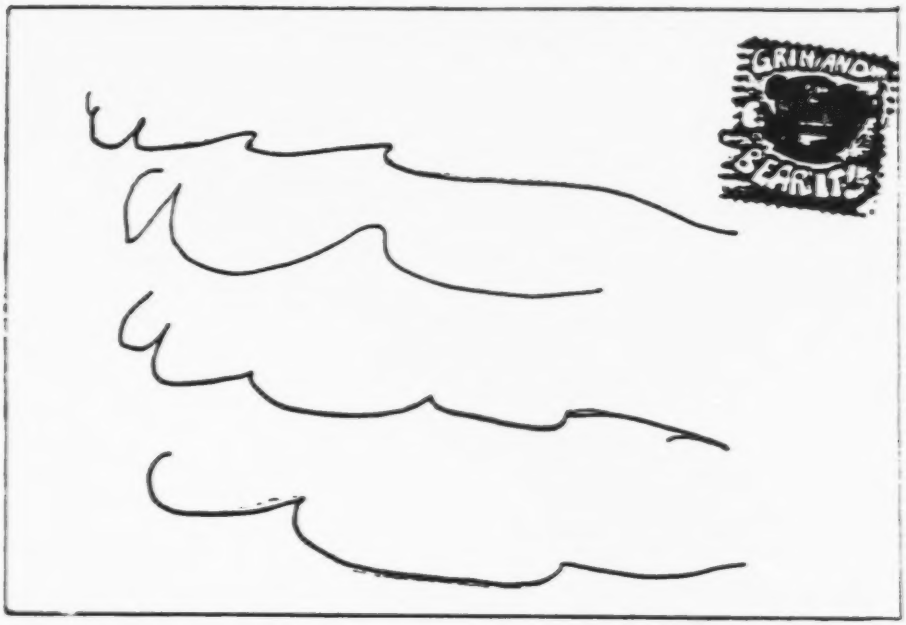
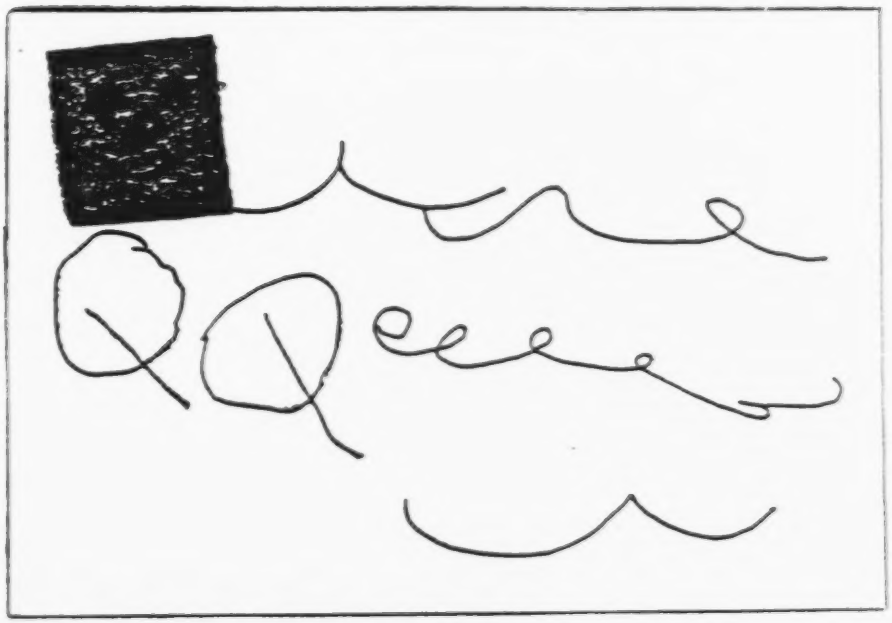


Figure 31. Amber's message. "I love you, Mother and Dad."



"Grandpa, How is your job?"

Come down soon." Amber said the check was for $500 for Grandma June to spend.

Deidre wrote four cards and mailed them. She read each one to the teacher. Three of them said, "I love you." One said, "Thank you for sending the mail." It was to Brian who was acting as mailcarrier at that time (Figure 32).

Brian wrote "To Shelley" on a junk mail envelope and said to the teacher, "That's how you spell 'to'." He then called to Shelley, "Shelley, for you." Brian pointed to his writing as he showed it to Shelley. "It says, 'To Shelley'."

Jace wrote his name on a card and put an x where the stamp would be. He said it was a post card to himself. He wrote on a second card, attached a stamp and said it was a letter to Deidre (Figure 33).

Thomas wrote his name and 606 on a card. He said it was a letter to 606. Carrie drew on a card, wrote 606 and put an x where the stamp would be. She said it was a rainbow for Shelley.

Informational. Jace wrote on a check to indicate that it had a monetary value of $100 (Figure 34). He gave the check to Jacob. Andy wrote JACOB on a card and said it was for Jacob. Amber wrote her name and her parents' names on a card.

Figure 32. Deidre's message. "Thank you for sending the mail."

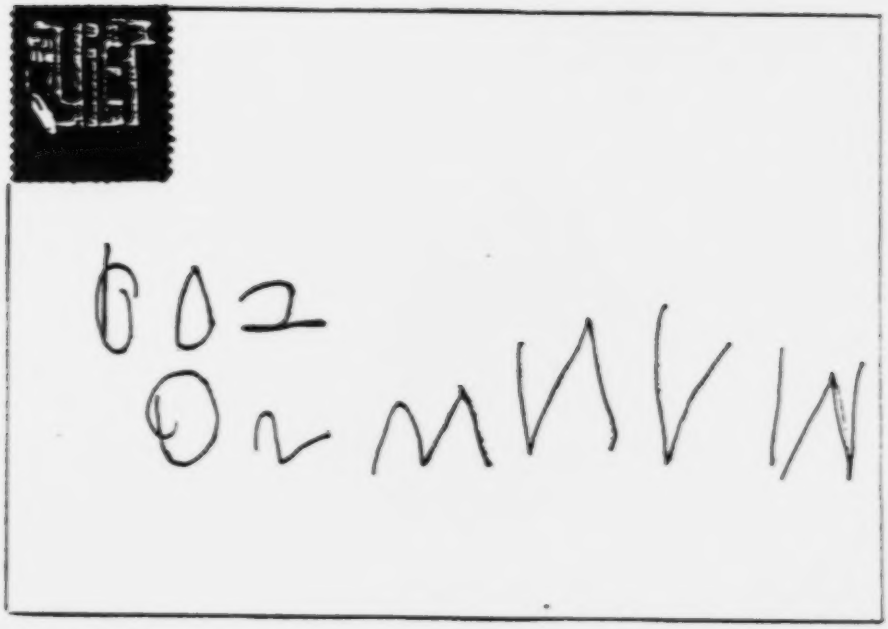


Figure 33. Jace's card. "It is a letter to Deidre."

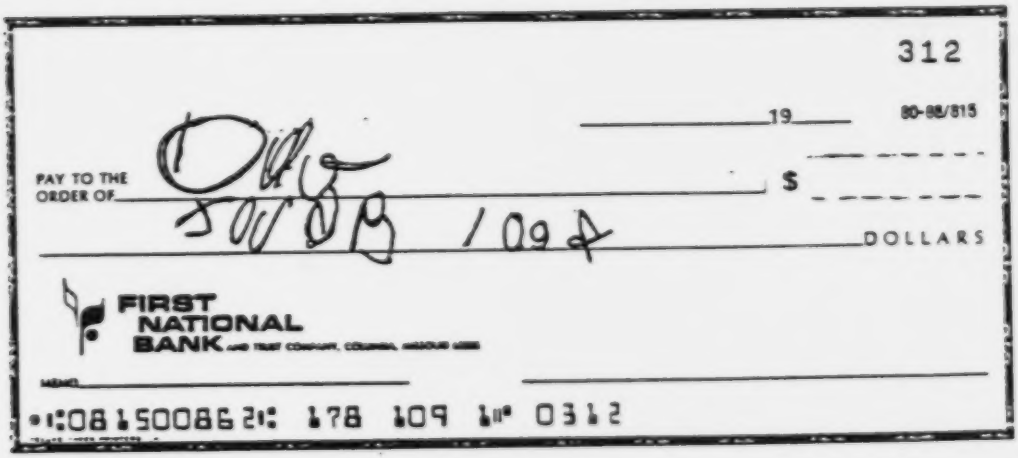


Figure 34. Jace's check for $100.

Center IV The Animal Hospital

Description of Contents: The animal hospital contained a 2' x 4' table, stuffed toy bear and mouse, a stethoscope, jars of cotton balls and Q tips, two children's animal picture books, four x rays, plain paper, and pencils. The animal hospital was walled on three sides by a cardboard. A sign, "Animal Hospital Veterinarian", a picture of a doctor with a stethoscope, and dog and cat pictures were posted on the walls. Two chairs were placed at one end of the table.

Use of Literacy

Regulatory. Brian wrote on a card at the vet table, put it on the post office counter and returned to the animal hospital (Figure 35). He said, "It says 'closed'. The post office now closed." Later he took the sign from the post office and said, "It's open now." Brian wrote on another card and gave it to Ryan saying, "Ryan, you got a ticket. You were speeding on the road." He read the ticket to the teacher, "Don't you know the rules?"

Thomas listened to the bear's heart with the stethoscope and cleaned its ears with a Q tip. He then wrote on a card, put it under the bear's chin and set the bear on a chair (Figure 36). The card said, "Come back to the doctor next week." He explained to the teacher, "The bear had a really bad cut on his paw." Thomas also used the stethoscope to examine the mouse. He cleaned its ears

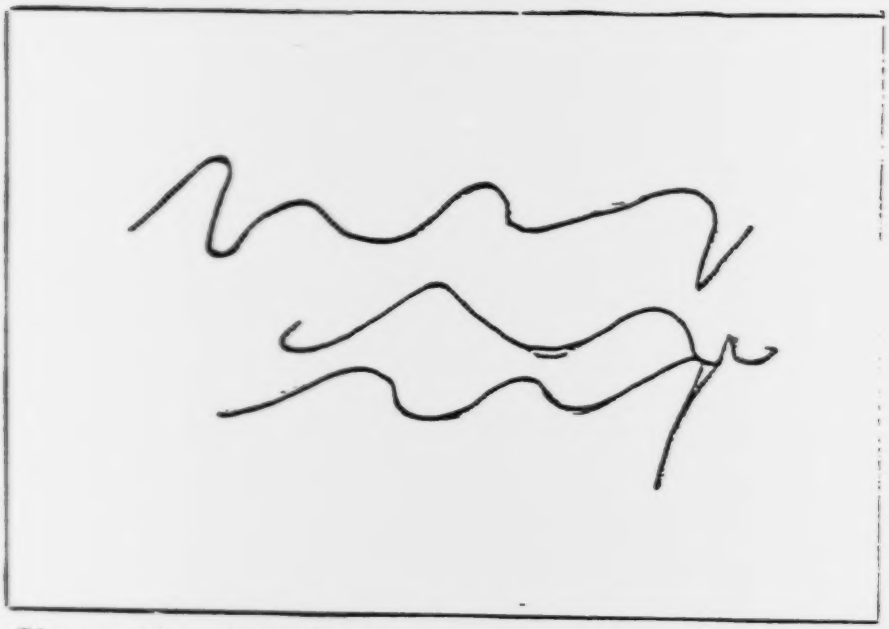


Figure 35. Brian's sign. "Closed"

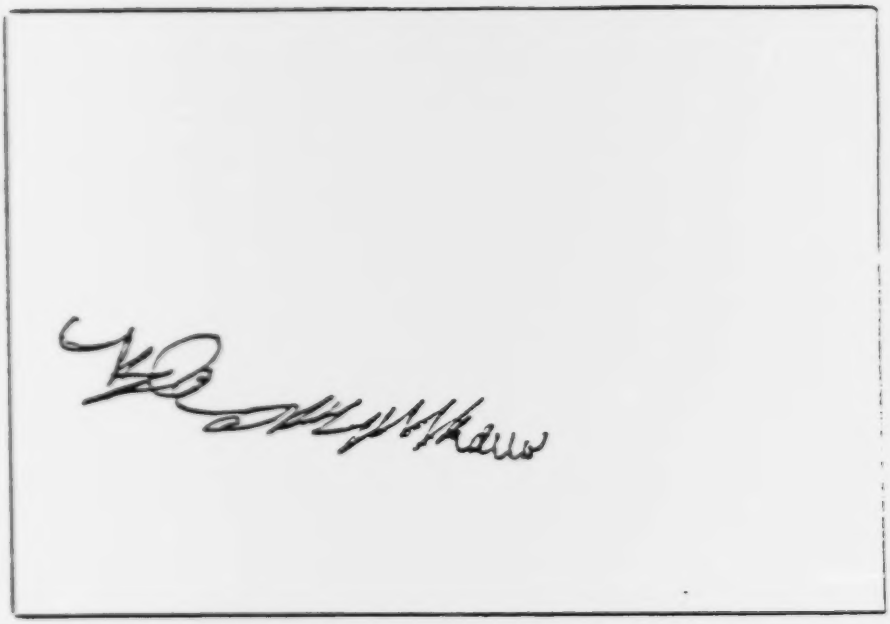


Figure 36. Thomas' prescription for the bear. "Come back to the doctor next week."

and then wrote on a card which he gave to Carrie. It said, "Milk."

Summary

The researcher was able to identify and classify the children's written language productions according to Halliday's seven functions served by language.

4. The children wrote prolifically in the office and the post office for instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal and informational purposes. The youngsters wrote less frequently in the housekeeping center. The purposes of their writing were instrumental, regulatory, interactional and informational. The least amount of writing was done in the animal hospital, and the only purpose of the writing in this center was regulatory. The children were not observed using the heuristic or imaginative functions of writing.

Discussion and Implications

The data strongly indicate that prekindergarten children use written language within the context of their symbolic play when literacy materials are available to them. The children demonstrated their developing knowledge of written language functions not only by writing for real-life purposes, but also by reading their writing and discussing the meaning of their written language with their classmates and teacher. The children's actions further verified the meaning intent of their writing. If we accept Piaget's theory that such symbolic play activities enable children to

better understand and construct knowledge of their life experiences, then we can appreciate the value of the children's activities as enabling them to progress in their understanding of written language use and meaning.

The results of the study led to educational implications for early childhood teacher educators and teachers. There is a need for teacher educators to share new knowledge by presenting inserice teacher workshops for school and professional associations and by providing classes within colleges and universities.

The teacher's role as preparer of the classroom environment is an important one. Teachers who understand early litracy development can create play settings which lend themselves to facilitating such learning. The traditional housekeeping corner is often unused by five-year-old children. The addition of literacy materials can give it new meaning for such children. The office is found in many classrooms but can be enhanced with a variety of literacy materials. Most early childhood programs present a unit on community workers which includes the mailcarrier. This center, too, can be enhanced with a variety of literacy materials. All children have experiences with doctors, some with the animal doctor. The youngsters' emerging concepts of the veterinarian as a writer and reader can be facilitated in the play center. Furthermore, the teachers who wishes to work effectively in a symbolic play environment can go beyond choosing

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materials, arranging space, and scheduling. They can facilitate learning interaction by moving in and out of the play centers, by making comments and suggestions, and by modeling role-appropriate behaviors (Smilansky, 1968).

Early childhood teachers are sometimes called upon to defend and justify their choice of the play environment for teaching and learning. This study provides support for teachers who chooses to provide their young students with symbolic play experiences to enable them to learn how written language is meaningful and useful. The encounters with written language described here can expand children's awareness of the functions of written language and facilitate their developing literacy.

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